

No. 237/ NOVEMBER 1992



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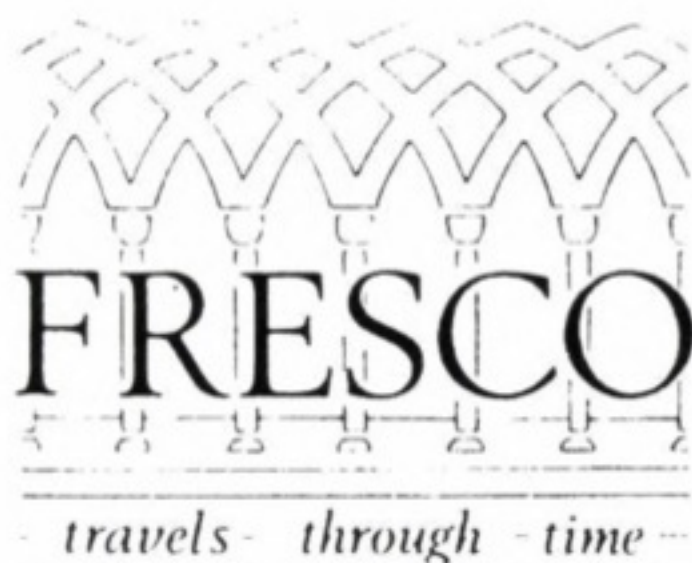
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THE 1992 READERSHIP SURVEY

EVERY year or so we aim to send out a readership survey to try and get a sense of who you are and what you think about the magazine. In 1986 we sent out forms to our entire UK readership: the response was nothing short of a deluge. These days the survey works more like an opinion poll: after we've processed a certain number of forms the broad-stroke figures are there, so we send out far fewer. Of course where our own survey fails to meet the standards of an opinion-polling organization is that the responders are self-selecting and likely to be pretty keen. All the same your feedback is always instructive – and entertaining.

This survey was doubly interesting because it was the first to be undertaken simultaneously in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa/New Zealand and the UK, allowing us to look at both the similarities and the differences between our national readerships.

So who are you? Well, you're half female and half male. This may not sound very surprising but current-affairs magazines normally have a significantly higher proportion of male readers: we're delighted to be bucking this particular trend. The vast majority of you are aged between 20 and 50, though British readers tend to be younger: twice as many of them are under 30 as in other countries. You tend to be extremely well educated: more than 60 per cent of readers in all countries have a degree. Around a third of you work in education.

Moving to your beliefs, there is an interesting geographical difference on the religious front. In all countries over 80 per cent of readers tick either the 'no religion' option or the Christian one: in Canada there are two Christians for every one with no religion; everywhere else the Christians are in the minority. This may have more to do with our traditionally strong links with church organizations in Canada than with a national characteristic of devotion.

The NI has always been a magazine which aims to reach out to the middle ground and not simply preach to the converted. For that reason we have been rather proud that surveys have turned up a few conservatives among our readers. This time there are no conservatives in the UK, though they still make up between two and four per cent of readers elsewhere. People everywhere are most likely to describe themselves as socialist or social democrat, though a third of Australian readers consider themselves Greens first and foremost, a far higher proportion than elsewhere.

You were overwhelmingly positive about the magazine: there was near unanimity across the world that we generally cover interesting subjects and that our issues are worth keeping for future reference. More than a third of you even went so far as to tick the box that said 'The magazine is an inspiration'. There is a general sense that the NI is valued as an antidote to the distortions of the mainstream media: this feeling seems to increase the further people live from a big city, especially in Canada and Australia. The interesting divergence here was between the 22 per cent of UK readers who wanted us to do more issues on personal subjects like sex and lifestyles and the lukewarm 7 per cent of readers elsewhere.

Your favourite sections of the magazine haven't changed over the years: the feature articles on the theme, followed by *Facts* and *Country Profile*. We mentioned in an aside earlier this year that no British readers had chosen the *Editor's Letter* – and a few people were kind enough to write in then saying how much they appreciated it. At least in other countries the *Editor's Letter* was more popular than the ads.

There was astonishing unanimity on the subject you would most like to see us cover: *Multinationals*. If the Annual Editorial Meeting mentioned on the facing page doesn't take account of this demonstration of reader power you should probably demand to know why.

The section of the survey most eagerly (or fearfully) anticipated by editors is that in which readers choose their favourite issues from the previous batch. Inevitably there was a bias here towards issues which had just appeared when the survey was circulated – even when people who hadn't subscribed for more than a year were excluded. Top of the pops was *The Arms Trade*; we'll draw a polite veil over those issues which drew the most apathetic response. There were interesting regional differences here: Australians were particularly fond of the *Human Rights Olympics* while Canadians favoured *Columbus*; the British were keen on *Vietnam* while people in Aotearoa much preferred *The Amazon*.

As always, editors of popularly successful magazines will tend to feel readers are voting for the subject rather than the treatment; editors of ignored issues will feel the reverse. But the readers' verdict still focuses our collective mind wonderfully. Thanks a lot to all of you who contributed.

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Fateful coincidences and near-death visions may not be as paranormal as we like to think, believes **Susan Blackmore**.



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In which the editor follows a course called 'How to have an out-of-body experience in 30 days'.

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FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION: JOANNE HASSALL
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THIS MONTH'S THEME

The Paranormal

FROM THIS MONTH'S EDITOR

How did we end up choosing an issue on the paranormal? The process of selecting the **NI**'s topics looms large in my mind as I write, just one week away from our Annual Editorial Meeting. Every member of the co-operative can propose themes, though the editors who will have to realize them inevitably tend to argue their corner with more passion. The 100 or so ideas on the table at the start of the day, many of them from readers or aid agencies, are whittled down to 12 by discussion, special pleading and tactical manoeuvring.

It isn't quite as random as it sounds. We're looking for a balanced year that will keep subscribers informed and entertained, which means it would be no good producing 12 issues on solid world development subjects – there's a lot more to life than the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. So we make sure there are magazines with a strong environmental theme, and others which delve into personal politics or

focus on single countries. But we are also looking for at least one issue which is a bit different, which will surprise even the most jaded subscriber.

The Paranormal obviously comes into that category. From the start my idea has been to weave my own encounters with mediums and psychics into the various perspectives of outside contributors. If I were a completely committed New Ager who consulted a personal astrologer before making decisions (like the Reagans) then there would be little point to this – you would understandably be rather loath to trust my judgment. Gullibility is like a minefield surrounding the paranormal. Being a fully fledged New Ager is in some ways akin to embracing Catholicism – having taken a leap of faith you accept

the whole territory, substituting crop circles and prophetic visions for the infallibility of the Pope and the miracles of the saints.

But the opposite view, which is unprepared to accept any paranormal occurrence whatever the evidence, also smacks to me of religious commitment: faith in Western rationalism as holding the answer to everything. It would also be very convenient for me as a journalist to take a cynical line: it's much easier to write entertainingly when you're damning something, and many New Agers are obviously sitting ducks.

As it is I've tried to keep an open mind and only make a tentative overall assessment (my own, I should stress, rather than the **NI**'s) at the very end. And if I've taken the mickey it's usually been at my own expense.

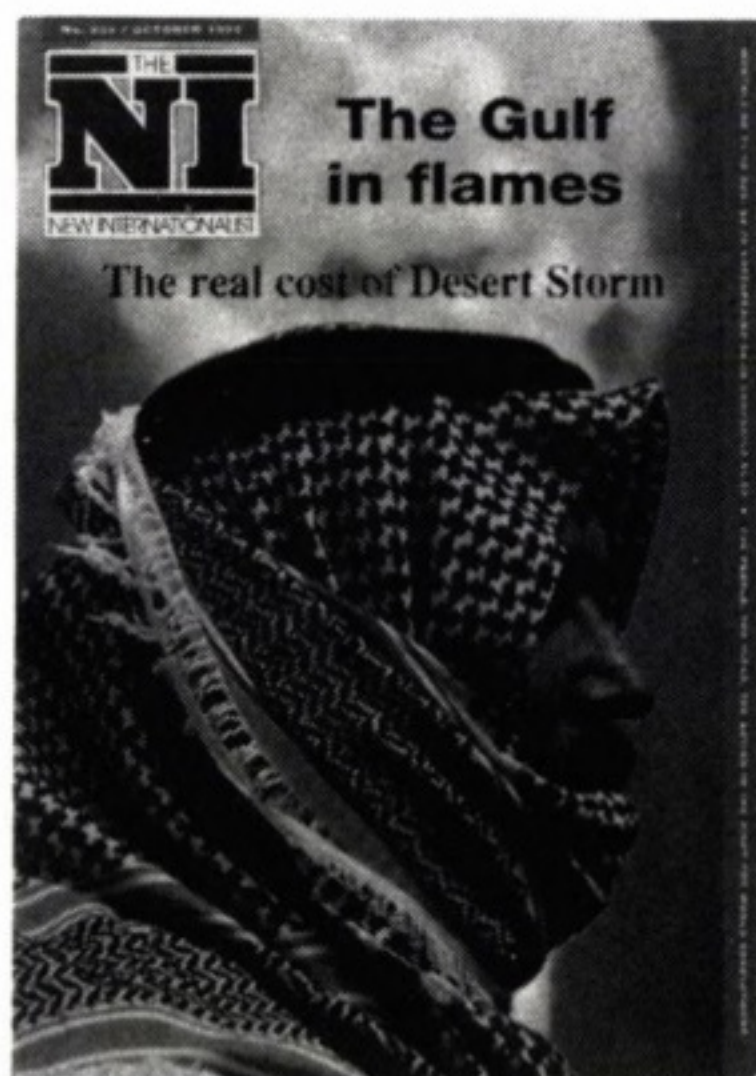
Talking of taking the mickey... In the last 18 months in this office I have been the butt of just about every joke about the paranormal you could think of (as often as not the same joke endlessly recycled). Why do my contributors have to use the postal service? Don't I already know the answer to my own question? Why don't we save money on this issue and just beam it telepathically to all our readers? Yeah, yeah. At least when you're writing about world hunger you're spared the comedy.

Chris Brazier

Chris Brazier
for the *New Internationalist* Co-operative

Disillusioned

As one who campaigned vigorously against the Gulf War, I welcome your issue *The Gulf in flames* (NI 236). Yet I know also that if Western governments were to decide a war were in order again, most criticism would vanish from the



press and many people would again be seething with mindless blood-lust. We have now witnessed at least two wars – over the Malvinas/Falklands and the Gulf – during which all reason, humanity and compassion vanished virtually overnight from otherwise intelligent human beings who got swept along by the emotional hype of government propaganda.

I would like to think it would all be different next time. But so long as the West can continue to solve its internal difficulties by creating paper tigers overseas, I know it won't. Bombing foreign tyrants to bits is so much easier than putting our own houses in order.

Alison Stanhope
Cambridge, UK

Planet protection

I believe that an important part of a solution to environmental degradation and Third World poverty is carefully planned health education programmes incorporating and promoting the benefits of family planning techniques. I object to the excessive bias and misrepresentation of the issues in *Sex, Lies and Global Survival* (NI 235).

Overcrowding undermines attempts to provide health care and education in any widespread way in developing countries. Why was no space given to such studies as the



The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address is inside the front cover.

Brundtland Report, which identified population restraint as part of a strategy for global survival? Why were we not given some detail about land redistribution in Kerala and how this has been successful in achieving a fall in fertility? And what about the work of Population Concern? The whole tone of the issue seemed to be stating a case for unrestrained fertility in a very emotional and unreasoned way. You have done the planet a disservice.

Jane Buchanan
London, UK

Breathless suspense

Regarding your issue on Population (NI 235), if world population growth were to continue at its present rate, in just a few hundred years there would only be enough oxygen in the air for a single breath per person. Of course starvation would end the population explosion long before this. World grain production per capita is already

falling, and I suggest that the recent tragic scenes in sub-Saharan Africa are a warning of worse to come. It is not for me as a well-to-do urban male in the rich North to decree how population is to stabilize, but stabilize it must.

Dr Douglas Holdstock
Pyrford, UK

Yours untrendily

Anuradha Vittachi's issue (NI 235) was interesting not only for what it contained but for what it left out. I think Northerners of liberal temperament should come to terms with the fact that chronic poverty in the South is due not only to Northern exploitation, but also to cultural factors. They include ethical beliefs which place no value on the individual, fatalism of a religious origin, and even such things as nomadic goat farming which is a primary cause of desertification. Add to this a potent cocktail of tribal hostilities, blatant election rigging, civil services that provide no service, military impatience

with civilian incompetence, destruction of the infrastructure by terrorists with bizarre beliefs, pointless wars – and you get the 90 per cent of the picture Ms Vittachi left out.

Louis de Bernières
London, UK

Brain exchange

Rosemary Thompson's contribution about unleaded petrol in NI 235 (*Curiosities*), smacks of hysteria – not uncommon among NI contributors – and strongly suggests to me that for the most part she is talking rubbish. If not, she is only asking us to exchange cancer for brain damage.

Peter Langley
Chalford, UK

Forest frenzy

The Canadian public's mood is becoming volatile over the indiscriminate clear-cutting of trees by the British Columbian Forest Industry and the industry is trying to transform its image by calling on American PR wizards Burson and Marsteller who 'solved' the PR problems of the former military junta of Argentina. These experts were also involved in Nixon's Watergate scandal and served former US President of the US, Ronald Reagan.

Inspired by an initial one million dollars plus promises of more, Burson and Marsteller have given birth to the 'non-aligned and independent' BC Forest Association (BCFA). This educates us about the marvellous achievements of the BC forest industry, the flawed perception we have of clear-cuts and the unfairness of the pesky media.

Contrary to the rhetoric, however, the industry is raking in handsome profits. Don't sacrifice our environment to an American-owned industry whose sole function is to extract BC resources at any costs.

Hans Krampe
Quesnel, BC, Canada

Misprint correction: We apologize for the misprint in the letter from Fay Roberts (Letters NI 233). It should have read 'black people in South Africa suffered the same (not some) oppression as conquered and dispossessed peoples everywhere.'

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the NI.

Half the story

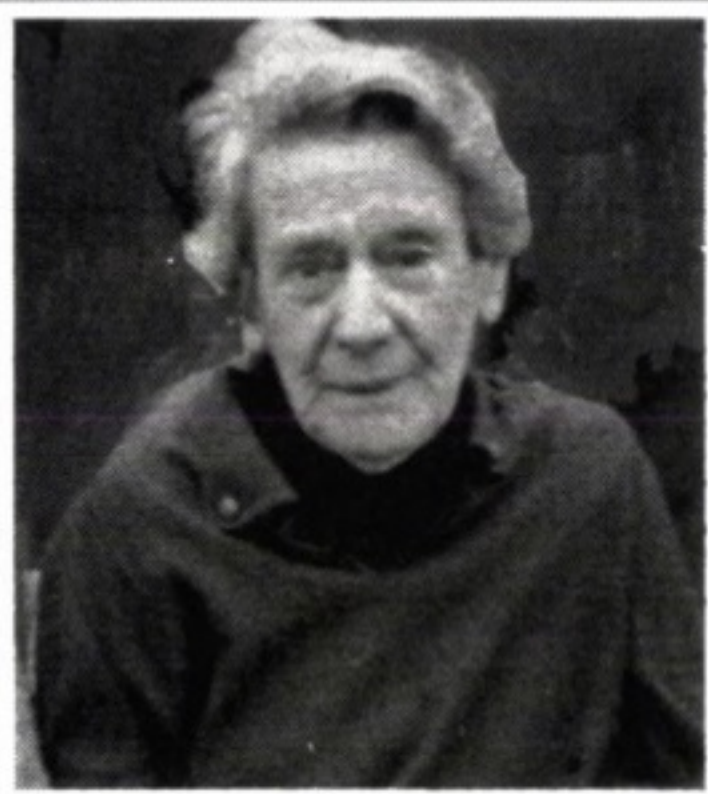
I usually enjoy reading NI although I am often mildly annoyed by what I see as a polarization of good guys and bad guys (usually North/West = baddies and South/East = poor old goodies). I have never considered buying the Third World Calendar because it shows only a part (the patronized part) of the world. Why can't you produce a 'Whole World Calendar' showing values and virtues of all cultures? After all we are continually being told today that we are one world and one people.

Mary Morgan
Southport, UK

Editor replies: The Third World Calendar allocates all 12 pictures to people, cultures and environments of the South because there is already plenty of visual information about the West, and most material produced elsewhere about the Third World is negative. The calendar aims to help rectify this imbalance.



ANN JESSIE
GLEN JENNISON



ANN Jessie Glen Jennison, Office Manager and Distributor for **New Internationalist**, Australia, died on 1 September 1992 aged 84. She was a stalwart supporter of the magazine who devoted herself to **NI** until January 1992 when she was no longer able to work because of cancer. Her hard work, courage, support and unfailing good humour will be greatly missed.

Born in an era when education for women was viewed as a way of filling time between birth and marriage, Ann refused to accept a fate of factory work or domestic service. She trail-blazed her way to Melbourne University – setting her pace with the vigour and determination which characterized the rest of her life, most of which she spent working as a farmer.

She was always for the underdog. And her zest for living inspired all who knew her. In 1970 when Community Aid Abroad advertised a position as assistant in the projects division, Ann applied and got the job. She was 62 years old.

Ann Jennison always insisted she was never old. She was a unique, brave woman, born before her time; a feminist who advocated freedom of choice for everyone and taught us all by her example. She had a deep belief in the worth of humanity. And her life was dedicated to the purpose of living by her deep conviction that each one of us has a valuable role to play in contributing to the good of all.

LETTER from LAHORE

A lesson too late

Maria del Nevo learns why education is not a human right but a privilege for many Christian children in Pakistan.

IMET Putras during my first stay in Pakistan, when I lived and worked for two years on a cathedral compound in the heart of the city. This place seemed to be a perfect haven of peace and tranquility, and initially I imagined it as a kind of Garden of Eden.

But once I met Putras I soon realised how superficial this image was. Indeed, the better I got to know him, the more the compound came to symbolise the gaping divide that exists within the Pakistani Christian community, between the small number of privileged church clergy and their flock – the two or three per cent of Pakistani people who are mainly sweepers, sanitation workers or bonded labourers.

Putras was six years old, the eldest son of a sweeper who had to keep a family of seven on a monthly salary of 1,000 rupees (\$36), which he earned at the church school. The family lived with the other sweeper families in a small area at the back of the compound which was surrounded by a high wall and a gate.

Each family lived in one room no bigger than 10 by 12 feet, with a narrow verandah at the front where they cooked their food. In the centre of the quarters stood a communal hand-pump and near the gate a communal latrine was hidden behind a torn curtain.

With no school to attend, the children sat throughout the day listless, naked and grubby, surrounded by piles of rubbish where flies swarmed. It was difficult to imagine that only a stone's throw away, wealth and magnificence sheltered the families of bishops and padres.

Then one day Putras walked through the main gates of the compound sobbing. He had been working with a car mechanic: thirteen hours a day, seven days a week, earning one rupee (\$0.4) per day. And now he was crying because the other boys in the shop, all Muslim, had been bullying him. He was tired and hungry and didn't want to go back to work next day.

When the wives of the clergy realised that the children of their sweepers were either spending their days idle or working in places where they were being exploited, they opened a school in the church hall.

The sweeper-quarters remained squalid, dirty

and diseased. But the children came out in little groups each morning and walked across the compound, neatly dressed, books under their arms, talking and laughing. Enthusiastically they sat on their mats on the floor, balanced their books on their laps and recited the Urdu alphabet in loud unison.

Soon afterwards Putras was sent to me every morning for an hour, when I taught him the English alphabet and counting. He was slow but he never missed his lessons. And when I left Pakistan a year later in 1988, Putras, then eight years old, was still attending school.

I never forgot him during the two years I spent in the UK, and when I returned to Lahore I made it a priority to visit him and his family.

Putras was eleven and as tall as I. I couldn't wait for his mother to finish her welcoming chatter, to enquire how he was getting on. 'Oh Putras left the school,' his mother said. I looked questioningly at Putras. And he stared steadily back. His mother explained that he had struggled at school; couldn't concentrate and was restless; wanted to go out to earn money to help his parents feed his brothers and sisters, and provide medicines for the youngest child, a victim of polio.

Then Putras himself spoke: 'I'm an apprentice

for another mechanic. I earn two rupees (\$0.7) for a nine hour day, six days a week. When I've learned more then I'll start my own business.' The chance of education had come just too late for him, he said.

The family walked back out with me into the fly-infested quarters. A child was urinating into the drain beneath the hand-pump. 'They haven't done anything to improve things here then,' I said, referring to the church leaders. 'They don't care,' Putras' mother said bitterly, 'they never even come here to see how we live.'

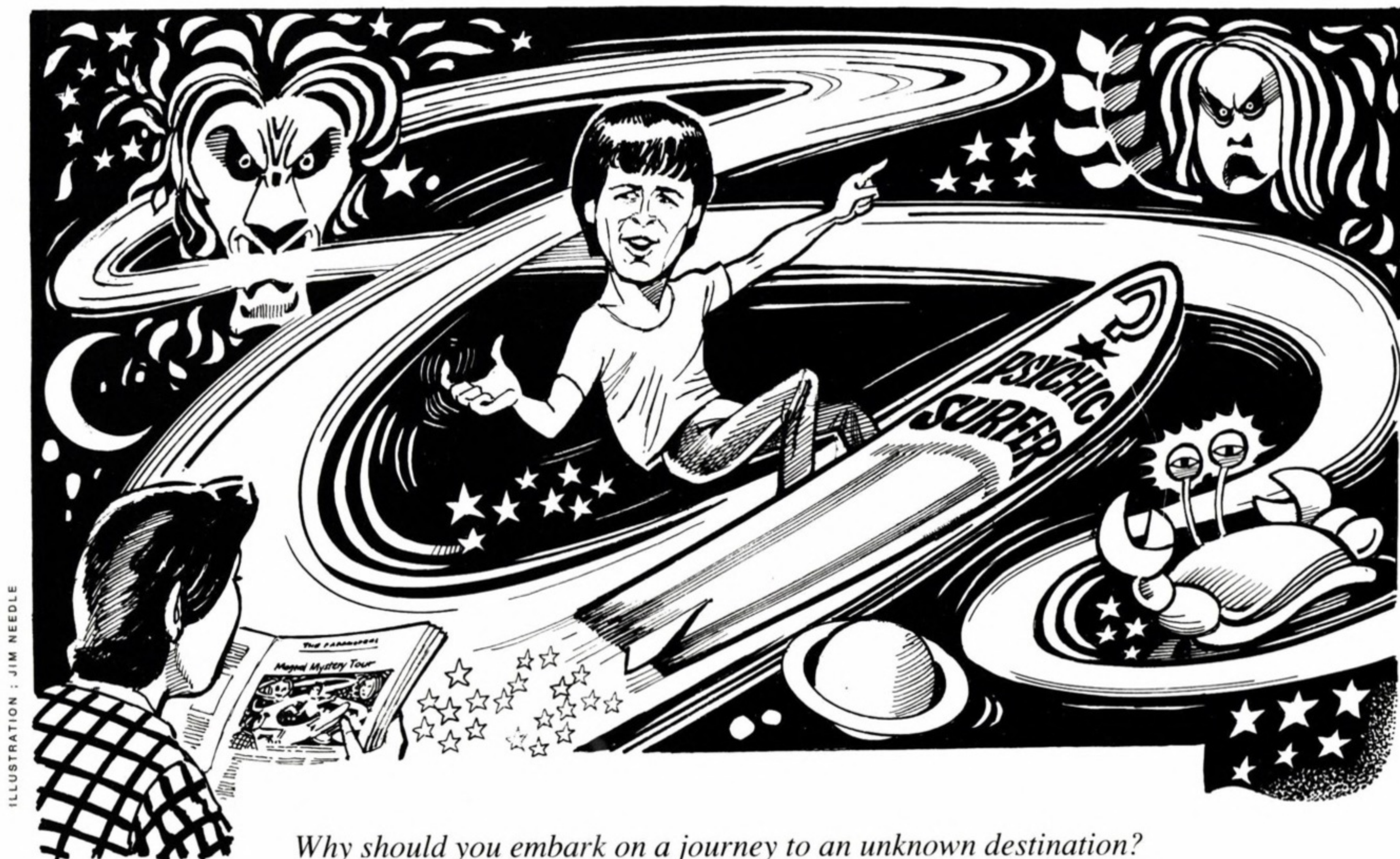
I looked at Putras, less dreamy than I remembered. And I realised that for him, like so many other Christian children in Pakistan, education had never been a right, but a privilege for those who had the time to learn. ■

Maria del Nevo is a former **NI** staff member who now lives and works in Lahore.



MIRIAM MCCURDY

Magical Mystery Tour



*Why should you embark on a journey to an unknown destination?
Chris Brazier tries to persuade a sceptical reader
to get on board.*

I THOUGHT I'd get back in touch with you, our most faithful reader, as I was planning to do something a bit different.

That would be nice. It seems to me you only wheel me on when you've come up against a boring subject and can't think of any other way of making it interesting.

I think I can safely say the subject isn't drab this time. We're taking a look at the paranormal...

The paranormal? Have you gone completely bananas? What's the NI doing wasting its time on that garbage?

Well, that's what I wanted to explain to you – some of the reasons behind our decision to give over a whole issue to this subject.

They'd better be good. When people are starving out there why should the NI give a platform to a bunch of charlatans, hucksters and self-deluding fools?

As always, you have an open mind.

Yeah man, open your mind to the positive vibrations, feel the power of the earth, open your inner spaces to the cosmic principle. I thought we'd left all that stuff behind with the hippies, yet here it is rearing up again. The New Age is just another way of distracting our attention from the political issues that matter.

If that's all the paranormal is, then maybe we'll find out by the end of the issue.

So now you're claiming *you* have an open mind. Hah! That's a good one. I bet you've decided exactly what you think before you even start work on an issue.

In the usual run of things there may be some truth in that. But in this case I genuinely don't know what I think or what the last page of this issue is going to contain. All I'm trying to do at the moment is explain why you and I are having this conversation at all.

Okay, why are we?

Well, one reason why the NI decided it was

time to take a serious look at the paranormal is the mess that the 'normal' Western way of operating has made of the planet. We're much more aware of the environment now and of how much more attuned to it are the indigenous peoples whose very existence is still under threat. Those indigenous peoples have a distinctly 'paranormal' approach to their environment – they see it as a living entity, an aspect of their own relationship to the spirit world.

And we should be prepared to 'learn from them'. A predictable NI line.

Well at the very least we shouldn't assume that their ideas are primitive and that we have all the answers. Then there's the Gaia Hypothesis which is becoming ever more respectable and popular in environmental circles. It posits the idea of the planet as a kind of conscious, self-regulating entity which may one day take its revenge on polluting humans – and if that isn't 'paranormal' I don't know what is.

Is that it? Are those the only justifications you can come up with?

Far from it. I just thought I'd get the easy ones in first. From here on in it gets a touch more technical.

Uh-oh.

I'm sorry. But you've always been such a good listener before that I'm sure you can take it. The story starts with Isaac Newton and his apple. From the moment he watched that apple fall to the ground and worked out why, Western science assumed that it would ultimately be able to explain all physical phenomena – that we just had to be clever enough and wait long enough to work it all out. Newton, Descartes, Galileo. They established laws of physics which still hold sway today and which we all learned about in school.

'For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.' 'I think therefore I am.' All that stuff.

Quite. But in the twentieth century we've been able to look much more closely at the physical world than those early Western scientists ever could. Newton's perception of the laws operating on the world he saw around him was extraordinary; but he could barely dream about monitoring and assessing events at the subatomic level the way twentieth-century scientists can.

I'm not sure why that should have changed things. An apple is an apple, however you look at it.

You'd be surprised. Newton certainly assumed that once you got down to the subatomic level, to the particles that actually make up an apple, they'd follow exactly the same laws as he'd shown to operate in the visible world.

But he was wrong?

Yes. The first dent in the model of classical physics came in 1900 when Max

Planck discovered why a heated object emits red light. According to all the laws of classical physics if you warm up an object it should emit the same kind of blue-white light that it does when it is extremely hot, just in lesser amounts. But instead if you heat an object moderately it turns red.

Red hot. Everyone knows that.

True, but it didn't make any scientific sense. Until, that is, Planck showed that if you excite the electrons of an atom by heating them up they absorb and discharge energy not smoothly and continuously, as had always been assumed, but in packets, jumping up or down from one level to another.

You're losing me...

I'm sorry, but bear with me a moment. All packets of red light are the same size and they're the smallest of all the visible colours, which is why they're the first to appear in the heating process. More intense heat liberates bigger energy packets of blue or violet light. Planck called these energy packets 'quanta' and thus became the parent of 'quantum mechanics'.

But why was all this so amazingly significant? It doesn't sound very earth-shattering to me.

Oh but it was. It was the first evidence that the subatomic world behaves according to completely different 'rules'. Eventually scientists were to discover that it doesn't actually operate according to rules at all, only according to 'probabilities'. It would have blown Isaac Newton's mind.

Hold on. I'm perfectly willing to turn my mind to a disquisition on the new physics or anything else — I sat through the NI's expeditions into economic theory, after all. But isn't all this rather a long way from the paranormal?

Not really. After all, things are only 'paranormal' because they don't fit

into our idea of what is normal, which still reflects the traditional Western scientific view. Physicists may talk about an entirely new reality but they're not exactly the world's greatest popular entertainers so



ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS / MARY EVANS

Bed of air: South Indian mystic Subbayah Pullavar levitating in 1936.

ordinary people tend to ignore them. Albert Einstein may be a household name but there aren't many people who read about his special theory of relativity for pleasure. Or if there are I haven't met them.

I suppose you're trying to tell me that if I sat down for a chat with a physicist and actually managed to understand what she said I'd find out she was a spoon-bender on the side...

Perhaps not. But you might have trouble telling whether she was a Western scientist or an Eastern mystic. These days they sound amazingly similar.

I find that very difficult to believe.

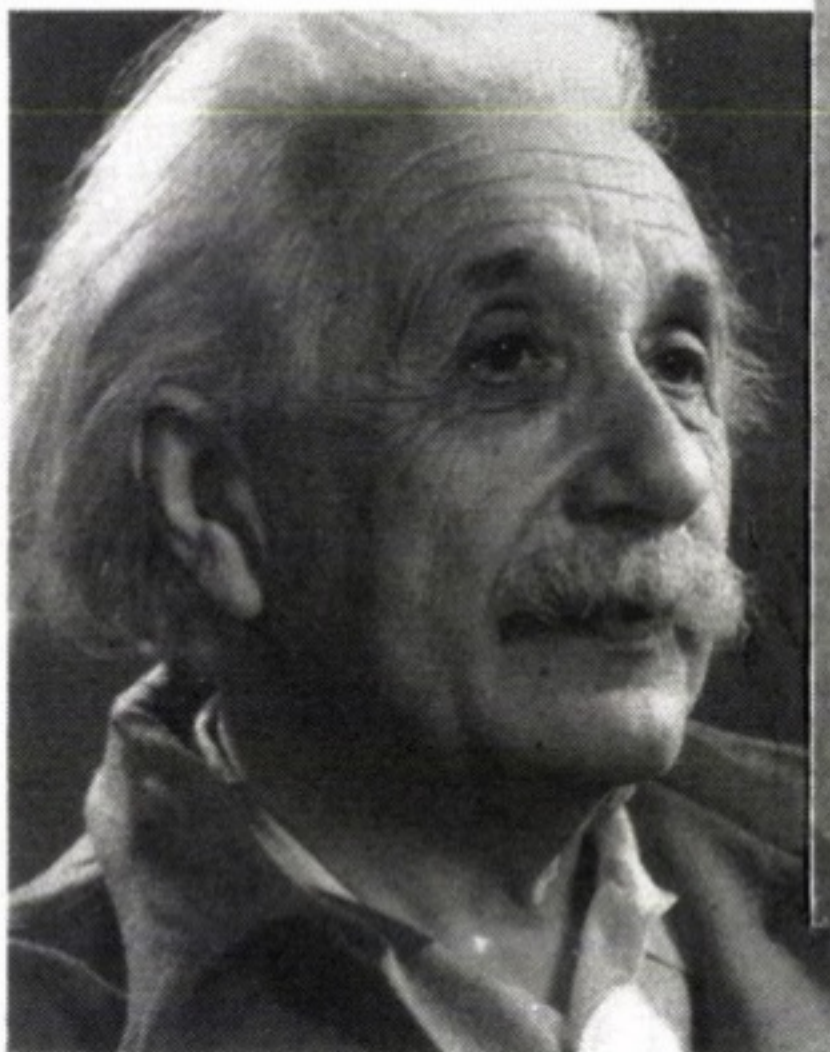
Okay, try this. Was it an Eastern mystic or a Western scientist who said this:

'The objective world simply is, it does not happen. Only to the gaze of my consciousness, crawling upward along the life line of my body, does a section of this world come to life as a fleeting image in space which continuously changes in time.'

It sounds like that Zen master in Kung Fu who used to call David Carradine 'Little Grasshopper'. But since you're asking me the question, I presume it must be a scientist.

Correct: H Weyl, writing about the *Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science* in 1963. How about this one then? *'Every attempt to solve the laws of causation, time and space would be futile because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three.'*

(continued overleaf)



IKARSH OF OTTAWA / CAMERA PRESS

Einstein old and young: as the world remembers him; and as he was in his twenties, just before he formulated his theories of relativity.

Someone pretty mystical, I suppose. Michael Jackson?

Close: Vivekananda, in his 1949 book *Jnana-Yoga*. The point is that it's pretty hard to see the dividing line between physics and mysticism. When Einstein was asked how he had found his theories of relativity, he answered that it was because he was so strongly convinced of the harmony of the universe.

I've rather lost track of why these physicists have become so mystical: they certainly never seemed that way when I was flogging through experiments to prove Boyle's Law at school...

Patience. We were talking about Max Planck. His discoveries set the cat amongst the pigeons and set other people thinking and experimenting along the same lines. People like Einstein.

Him again. Are you going to explain the theory of relativity to me in a couple of sentences now?

Maybe next month. For now let's talk about his discovery that light is made up of particles of energy which he called photons: these bang against the electrons in any object they strike like billiard balls.

Again, so what?

This was a shocking theory because it contradicted what had already been proved a hundred years before and remains true today: that light is made up of waves.

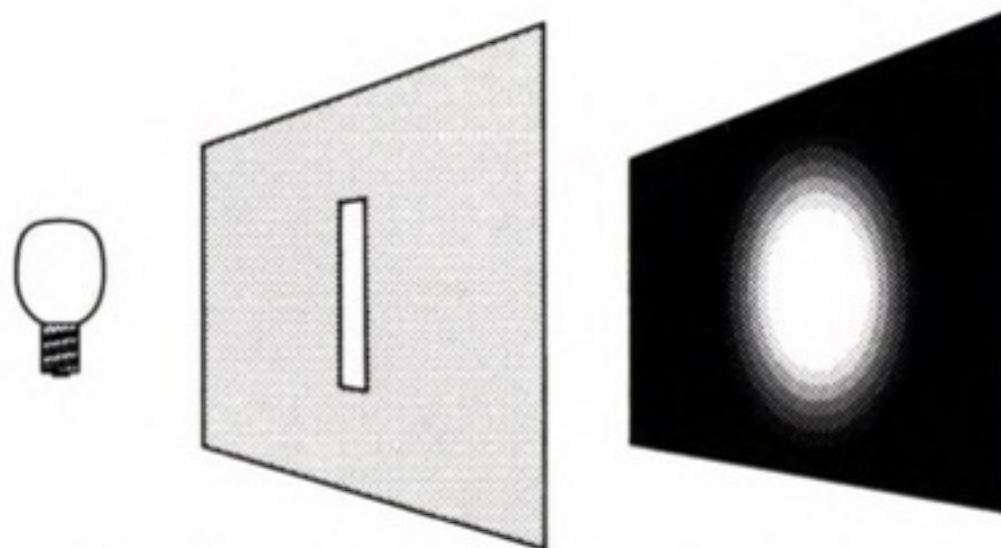
Wait a minute, let me get this straight. Light is made up of waves (which can't be particles) and particles (which can't be waves). You can't have it both ways.

Ah, but you can. We've been trained by our whole cultural upbringing to expect science

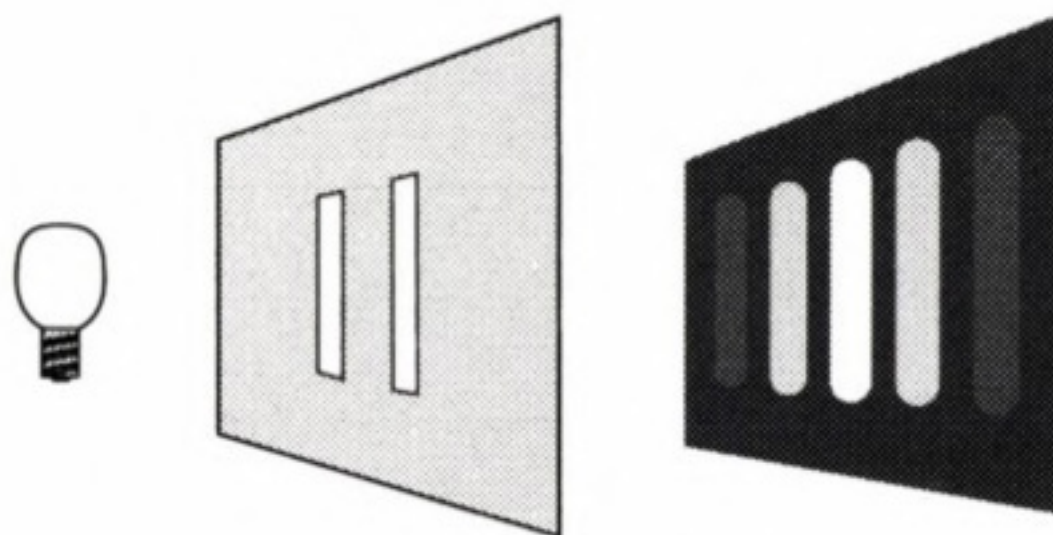
to deliver a single answer, the Absolute Truth. But in this case there isn't one. And what's even more confusing is that light is made up of whatever we want it to be.

Back to the mystical mumbo-jumbo...

No, we're back to tried and tested laboratory experiments. If you decide you want to show that light is made up of waves you follow Thomas Young's experiment from 1803. This shines light onto a wall through two thin vertical slits. If only one slit is open you get a round shape on the wall like this...



And if both slits are open you get a pattern like this...



This proves that light is made up of waves: when they go through a single slit as narrow as the light's own wavelength, they start spreading out like a fan; but when they pass through two slits they interfere with each other, cancelling each other out to create dark patches. Waves in the sea behave in the same way.

This is getting a bit too much like those old science lessons at school.

I know. I won't take this much further: you are supposed to be reading this for pleasure.

You're joking. It's just a question of how much pain I can bear each month.

You can prove the wave-like nature of light any time. But if you prefer to prove that light is made up of particles you can do that too (via Einstein's photoelectric experiment). You'll get the answer that you're looking for.

I can't accept that. There simply must be one answer.

The most able scientific minds of the century long ago gave up any attempt to find one. Just accept for a moment that light is also made up of photons (Einstein's name for the bullet-like particles of light) and consider the same two-slit experiment as before. A single photon can go through one slit and land in an area that would be dark if two slits were open. How does the photon know

whether the other slit is open or closed?

I don't know. What's the answer?

Can't you guess? There is no answer. Nobody knows. But some scientists have speculated that photons may be conscious – in other words that the tiniest building bricks of the universe may be capable of conscious decision.

Oh sure. So when I lie in my bed at night all the atoms that go to make it up are consciously deciding to hold me off the ground?

Hardly. The real point is that it's a mystery how the photon knows instantaneously what is going on somewhere else. Or why if you alter the 'spin' of an electron, there is an instantaneous equal and opposite change in the 'spin' of an electron elsewhere, with which it has no connection. Only the negative associations would stop us calling things like this 'paranormal'. And then at the subatomic level you can't observe anything without changing it. The very fact of our looking at something exerts an influence on it. You might say it's like the feeling that you know someone is staring at your back.

Ah, at last! We're into real paranormal territory.

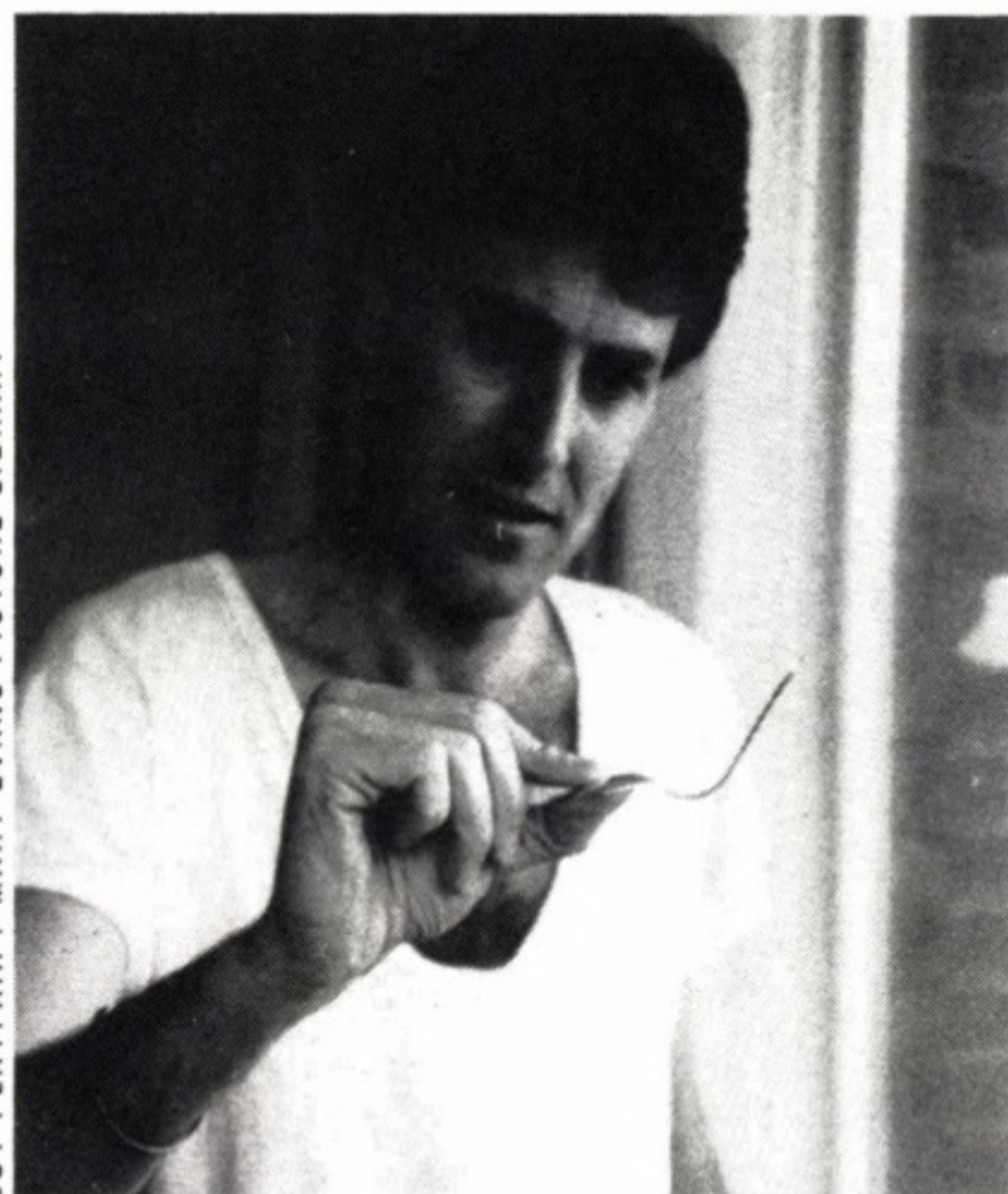
We are. I've given you the barest taster of the new physics, which gets a lot more complex and mind-bending. If you want to investigate quantum mechanics, relativity and their implications any further, try reading Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, which I've drawn from liberally.

But we're starting out on a different journey now, a genuine magical mystery tour to an unknown destination. The new physics doesn't prove the existence of paranormal phenomena like telepathy and psychokinesis (spoon-bending and the like). On the other hand no less a physicist than British Nobel laureate Brian Josephson argued recently that 'psychic phenomena may be both consistent with physics and conceivable in rational terms.'¹ And if you accept that the normal laws of science don't apply as soon as you enter the subatomic world then dismissing all kinds of experiences on the grounds that they are 'paranormal' becomes a bit presumptuous.

Presumptuous I may be, but I'm still going to be sceptical.

And that's fine – provided you're open-minded too. Let's make this magazine a brief space in which we lay aside our preconceptions and look again at the paranormal to see if there's anything to it. And we'll start with a statement of the sceptical case against which everything that follows ought to be measured. ■

Psychic or conjuror? The controversial Uri Geller.



GUY PLAYFAIR / MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

¹ 'Has psychokinesis met science's measure?', *Physics Today* (July 1992).



All in the mind

Experiences that seem paranormal may have very simple and mundane explanations, argues Susan Blackmore.

BELIEF in the paranormal is widespread and persistent. In many cultures it is practically universal and even in Europe and the United States about half the population believes in extrasensory perception (ESP). The most common reason they give is personal psychic experiences.

It might then seem stupid to deny that psychic experiences occur. Not so. We certainly cannot deny that people have the experiences, but we can question their interpretation. Perhaps they have misinterpreted as paranormal something which is actually quite normal.

I began research into the paranormal

some 20 years ago, after having a long out-of-body-experience in which I seemed to float out of my body and travel across the world. Expecting to find evidence of the paranormal, my great hope was to show how fundamental it was to understanding the human mind.

My conclusion now is that there may well be no paranormal phenomena. The experiences are real enough but they are not paranormal. The way to understand the human mind is not to invoke spirits, souls, telepathic powers or psychic vibrations but to understand how our minds naturally lead us to misinterpret the world around us.

Let's take the example of a dream that

comes true. Suppose you dream that your favourite cousin is being buried in a coffin and the very next morning you get a call to say that she died in the night. What would you think? If you're human at all you'll probably think it must have been precognition (seeing into the future) or telepathy (mind to mind communication). You might try to calculate the odds of it happening just when you dreamed it. Could they be 1,000 to 1? 100,000 to 1? Surely they must be astronomical mustn't they?

No. And the reason is that we are asking the wrong question. After any event you can always imagine that the odds must have been astronomical – the number plate

on your car having the same number as your theatre ticket; your thinking of a friend just as he rings; the falling tree which doesn't kill anybody. In retrospect any of these can look extraordinary, but could you have predicted any of them? With the thousands of things that happen every day, some coincidences are bound to appear extraordinary.

Dreaming death

One way through this tangle is to look at the chance of a death dream coming true for *anybody*. One British statistician, Christopher Scott, has calculated how often death dreams should come true by chance. He assumes only that each person has one death dream in their lifetime and works out how often that should coincide with the death of the person dreamed about. Allowing for how many people die each night, even in a small country like England, he concludes that this startling coincidence will happen to someone once every two weeks. Now each of these events is pure chance, but the people involved will almost certainly think it was psychic – and be wrong.

This is really the crux of the issue. When we call something paranormal we are implicitly saying that it could not have been chance. But how good are our judgments of chance and probability? The answer is 'terrible'. Psychologists have long known that people aren't like computers when it comes to estimating probabilities. They use a variety of short cuts to guess, relying on dubious things like how easily they can imagine different outcomes.

This leads to an interesting hypothesis. Perhaps people come to believe in the paranormal because they misjudge the probabilities of everyday events. If so we would expect the believers (often called sheep!) to make worse probability judgments than the disbelievers (or goats). Recently this has been confirmed in our own experiments at Bristol University in England and at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. When asked a variety of probability-based questions, the goats performed better than the sheep.

Psychic illusions

Memory can also create psychic illusions. Memory does not bring back a perfect copy of the past. It couldn't. Rather we *reconstruct* what happened and how. In the process, whether we are recalling the events of the Gulf War or reliving the sensual delights of last evening, we contract, expand, simplify and distort to produce a convincing and coherent account. We remember the things that fit in and forget those we would rather not accept. We fill in missing details to cover the bits we never paid attention to – often filling

them in correctly, but also often not.

There is nothing wrong with this process. It is memory doing its job. No finite brain could hold precise information on everything that ever happened. It has to be simplified and pushed into shape. But the consequences are important. Of all the chance events that happen in our lives we are likely to remember the strange coincidences and forget the meaningless ones. So the strange ones appear to happen more often than they really do. We start to look for an explanation, cannot find one and so we call it paranormal. But actually no explanation was ever required. The perfectly normal processes of chance and memory led us astray.

Memory tricks us in another way. Every day thousands of fortune tellers, palm readers, clairvoyants, astrologers and New Age 'channellers' are peddling their 'insights' for big fees. Many people spend money they cannot afford; some spend literally fortunes on getting psychic advice.

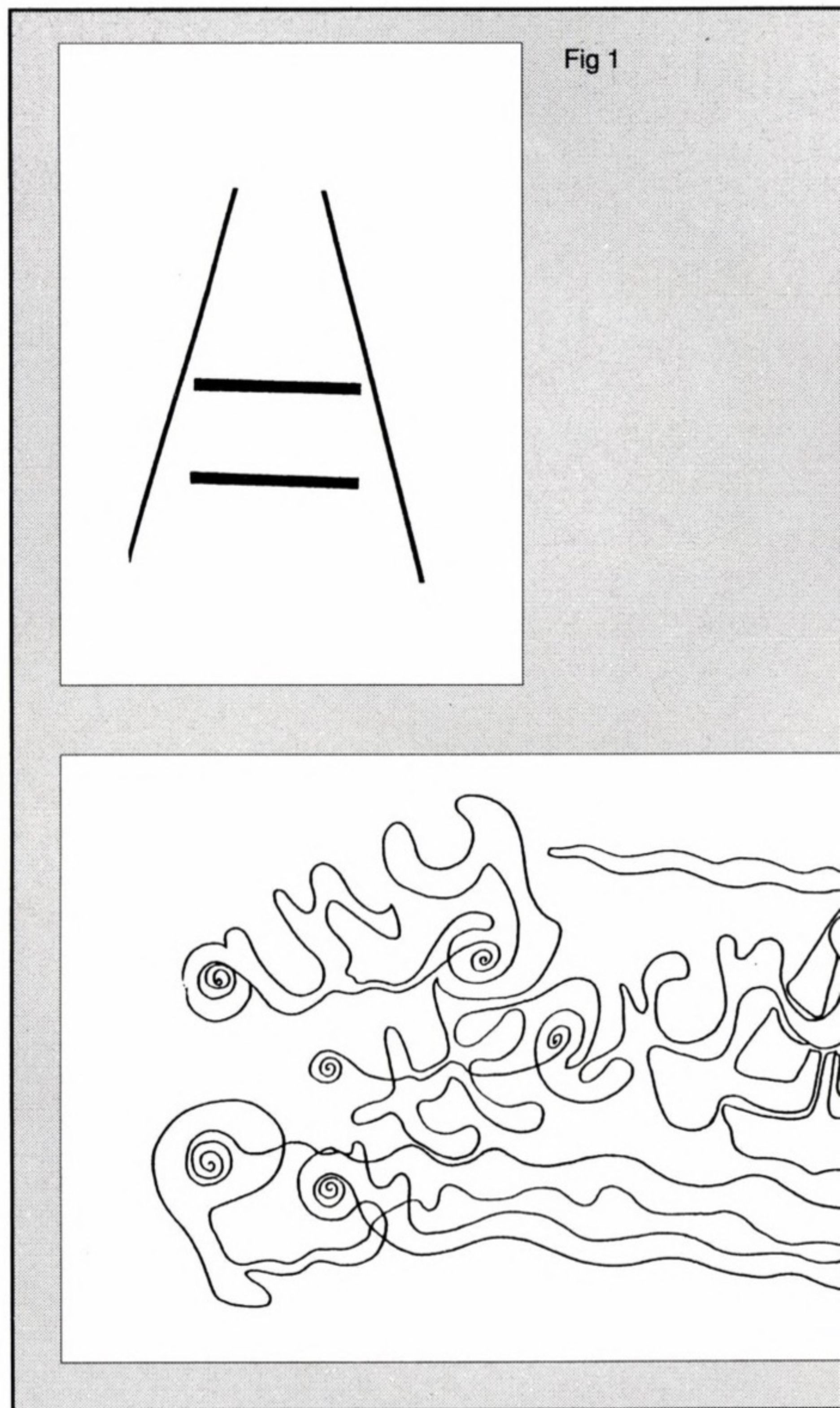
And is it good advice? Memory is at work here too. Imagine you spend half an hour with a psychic. How many pieces of information will you be given? Perhaps a few hundred, a thousand? It is hard to say but you can be sure that you won't remember them all, and the ones you do recall will be the ones that fit – the ones that make sense, the ones you want to hear. The rest will be forgotten and you may not realize they were ever said.

US magician James Randi has long been the scourge of mediums and psychics and his book *The Truth about Uri Geller* claimed Geller was using standard magic tricks to do his feats. Randi recently transcribed a man's session with a psychic. He asked the man how many names the psychic mentioned and how many of those

meant something to him. About half a dozen was the answer, and they were all correct. When Randi counted there were actually 37 names in the transcript.

The point is not that the man was somehow incompetent. We are all like this. Our memories drop facts which don't fit in. For most purposes it doesn't matter – but one consequence is that it makes us believe in the paranormal when we really don't need to. Believing in the paranormal

Fig 1



may give us a delightful sense of mystery, of being in control, of having access to special advice, but if it is a false sense the price we pay may be counted in more than just dollars.

All this implies that psychic events may be just an illusion. The obvious comparison is with visual illusions and the comparison is closer than you might think. We don't

see visual illusions because our brains aren't working properly – quite the reverse. Visual illusions are the inevitable consequence of the way our visual systems work – a way which for most purposes is extraordinarily efficient, so efficient that no human-made computer vision system comes anywhere close to being able to 'see'.

In Figure 1 everyone sees the top line as longer than the bottom one. The reason is simple. Your visual system interprets the

around us (can you see any pattern in Figure 3?). When we see patterns we cannot explain we look for explanations. If none is to be found we conclude it must be psychic – and we draw the wrong conclusion. If this view of psychic experiences is correct we might expect 'sheep' to see pattern in random shapes more easily than 'goats'. Our recent experiments in Bristol confirm this.

Another experiment concerned psychokinesis, or mind over matter, rather than ESP. If the same theory is applied we could see psychokinesis as an illusion of causality. We wish something to happen, it does, and so we conclude that our wishing was responsible – like driving up to traffic lights and willing them to change. If this too is an illusion then 'sheep' should be more prone to it than 'goats'. In experiments with a computer coin-tossing game we found that 'sheep' were more likely to think they had controlled the randomly flipping coin. We concluded that their proneness to this illusion of control may lead them in ordinary life to look for psychic explanations.

This way of understanding psychic experiences may underlie everything from precognition and telepathy to psychokinesis, but what about that out-of-body experience that first set off my quest for the paranormal? Or the dark tunnels that people close to death fly through to

our brains are constructing a model of the world from a viewpoint behind the eyes. The question then becomes: why should I suddenly seem to see the world from somewhere on the ceiling instead? The answer may be because I am dying and my brain can no longer construct a normal view of the world; because I am in terrible pain or am so relaxed that I feel I am floating. But why should even these experiences result in a bird's-eye view?

Ceiling with a view

The answer is that many memory models are in bird's-eye view anyway. For example, try to recall the last time you had to speak in public. Do you see the scene as though from where your eyes were? Or do you see yourself 'down there'. Many people see themselves as though in bird's-eye view. It is my suggestion that this view is simpler for the brain to construct when under stress and so this bird's-eye view takes over and seems real. This fits with recent experiments showing that people who have out-of-body experiences have better spatial imagery skills, are better able to switch viewpoints in imagination and are more likely to see themselves in dreams.

The tunnel too invites a normal explanation. In the brain's visual system there are far more nerve cells devoted to the centre of your visual field than to the edges of what you can see. Imagine now that the brain is dying. The first cells to be affected are the inhibitory ones which damp down the activity of other cells, with the result that there is widespread random activity in the brain. In the visual areas this means lots of activity in the centre and less towards the edges. And what will this look like? Possibly a bright light in the centre which gets bigger and bigger as the activity increases, in other words a light at the end of a tunnel.

If tunnels, out-of-body experiences and visions of various kinds can one day all be explained, doesn't that deny the very basis of spirituality? Certainly not. These experiences can have profound effects on people. Even if the light is a matter of brain activity, passing down that tunnel and feeling you have left your body can make you reassess the meaning of your life and glimpse the very fragile nature of the constructed 'self'. All this, it seems to me, is the true basis of spiritual experience and should not be ignored.

Hunting for the paranormal is not the way to understand the human mind; explaining our most puzzling experiences may be. ■

Susan Blackmore is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of the West of England. She is author of *The Adventures of a Parapsychologist* and *Beyond the Body*.

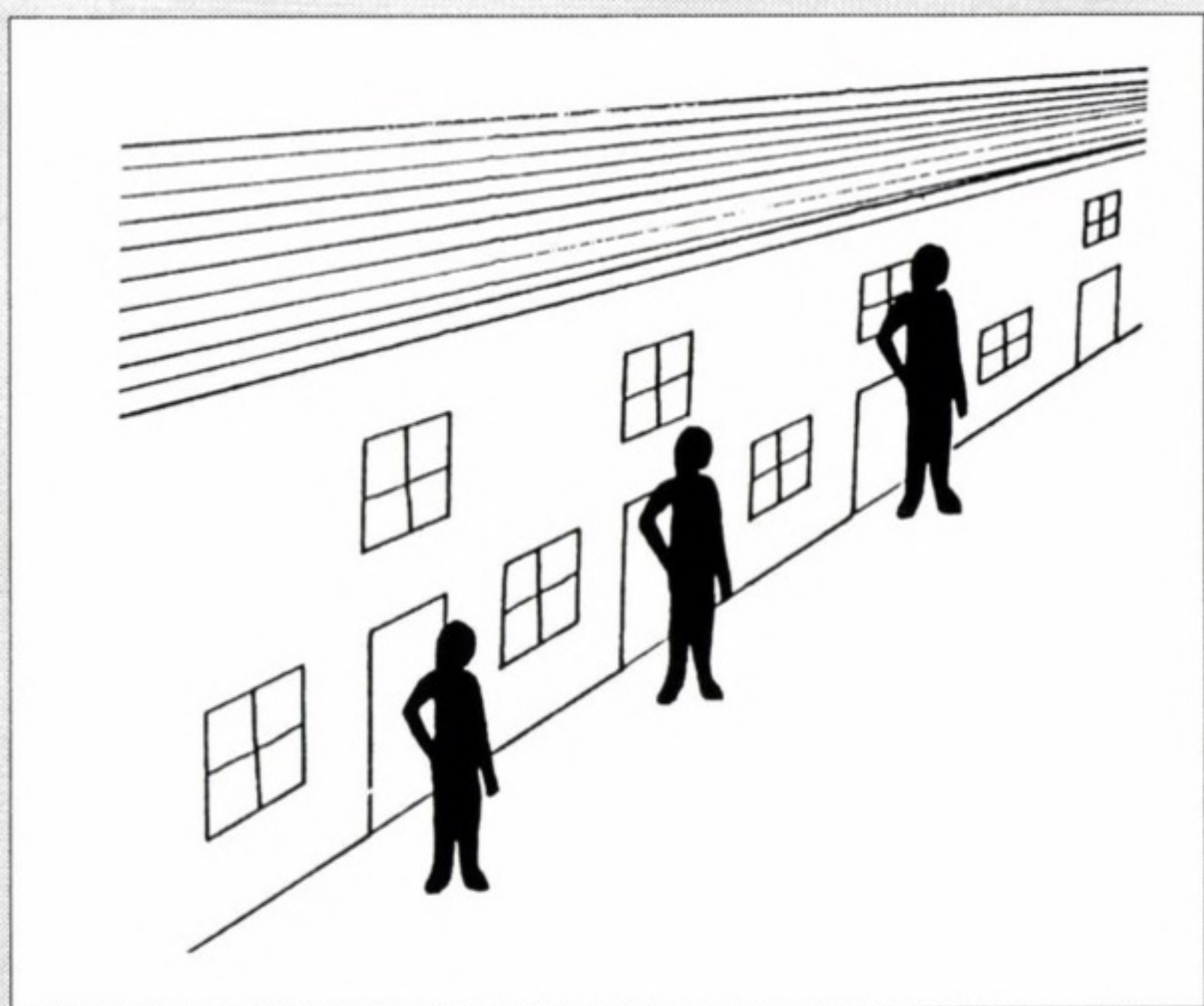


Fig 2



Fig 3

sloping lines as receding into the distance. If they were, the top line would be longer. The same effect is at work in Figure 2. It is the effectiveness of distance perception that produces the illusions – not something going wrong.

I suggest it is just the same with psychic experiences. Our natural tendency is to look for pattern and meaning in everything

emerge into the light? These have little to do with probability but they may also have little to do with the paranormal.

Understanding out-of-body experiences means understanding our normal way of seeing the world. Normally we imagine that we are a self inside our heads looking out. In fact this is a mental construction. There is no little person in there. Rather

Aiming out of body

ONE of the problems with the paranormal is that the 'evidence' for it is inevitably subjective. But this magazine is built on the premise that you can investigate this area without falling into the trap of being a 'sheep' or a 'goat'. You can see the charlatans and self-deluders for what they are but also approach each experience openly and not just seek out material for a cynical demolition-job. All the same, there's nothing scientific or comprehensive about this investigation. It's a random wander through the territory – a magical mystery tour.

Let's start with the 'out-of-body experience', or OBE for short. This is fairly common: someone here at the **NI** believes, for example, that she once left her body as she lay on a hospital bed and spent minutes examining herself from up near the ceiling before deciding that she had to 'go back'.

So as part of my first efforts to get to grips with this topic, back in the summer of 1991, I tried to follow a course called *Have an Out-of-Body Experience in 30 Days*. The blurb for the book said that it would lead me 'into more and more advanced variations, from flying to distant realms and going back in time to communicating with loved ones far away and the exquisite pleasures of OBE sex'. Sounds pretty good, I thought. Even if it's all an illusion I wouldn't mind some of that.

DAY ONE

Okay, I first have to celebrate my relationship with my body. This is not an easy thing to do in the office – I have to stand naked in front of a full-length mirror. So I seize the opportunity on a rare occasion when I'm working at home on my own. I strip off and stand pondering how I feel about my body; it is hard to do much else but be conscious that it is bloody cold. I start deep breathing, alternately looking at the image of myself in the mirror and closing my eyes to compare the image in my mind. Blank. I can't conjure up any clear visual image of my body, just the most shadowy of outlines. This poverty of visual imagination may prove to be a drawback in the pursuit of an out-of-body experience...

The phone rings. It's one of my fellow editors wanting to know what I thought of

the first draft of his Keynote. So I offer my suggestions as to how to improve it, omitting to mention that I'm sitting completely naked as I do so – I figure he might find this a tad disconcerting.

Now I lie down and with my eyes open try to see out from within my body, to shrink my consciousness down deep so that my skin feels like a baggy overcoat. I find this difficult, to say the least. I'm tempted to close my eyes. As soon as I do I fall asleep – my toddler children Kate and Misha have been waking up at 5.30 for days now and it's also my job to see to them in the nights.

DAY TWO

This stage actually takes four or five days. I have to master the technique of alert relaxation and find it hard. I am supposed to feel waves of warm mental energy coming up from my feet as the various parts of my body relax. I can't capture the waves but on the other hand I do usually end up feeling very relaxed.

I have trouble getting beyond this step because the next one involves going out to a public place and simply sitting for an hour or two to concentrate on my sense of hearing. When I'm supposed to fit this in I have no idea. I've got too much to do when I'm at work and when I'm not I have the kids. I took Kate and Misha down to the local shopping mall with a vague idea that I might focus on the sounds there. But all I hear is Kate jabbering away, pleased to be chatting to her Daddy, asking 'What that Daddy?' And I'm pleased to be chatting to her too.

DAY SIX

I'm trying to isolate and stimulate my sense of taste now. I put together a lunch of egg mayonnaise, raspberry jam, tomato, tortilla chips, chocolate, cole slaw, soya dessert, cucumber, marshmallow and peanuts. I eat a mouthful of something sweet, clear my palate with water, then taste something savoury and so on. I don't end up nauseous but it tastes, well, like egg mayonnaise, chocolate, marshmallow...

DAY SEVEN

Now I'm in the garden with my eyes closed for two hours. I should be on a beach or in a park with my partner guiding me around but again the children make me bend the rules. Still, I stick to the programme as closely as I can. Pat places things in my hands with a variety of different textures from a leaf through to something indeterminate but repugantly slimy while I concentrate on the input of my non-visual senses. Every now and then Kate asks 'What Daddy doing?' or imitates her mother by putting something icky on me. This may account for why the flood of visual information which the book suggests will occur when I open my eyes is disappointing. More of a trickle really.

THE END

I swear I tried hard and would honestly have liked something to happen but it just seems like I'm getting nowhere. The things the course requires me to do are so removed from the normal patterns of my life that they are very hard to maintain. Over the last few days I haven't consciously decided to abandon it but I've lapsed anyway. I don't dismiss the course – it seems entirely possible that you could train your mind in this way and have a very unusual experience, just as extraordinary things can result from very disciplined meditation. But I'm not sure this kind of 'psychic development' is really intended for parents of small children. Shame I never got to the 'Erotic Variations' of Day 21.

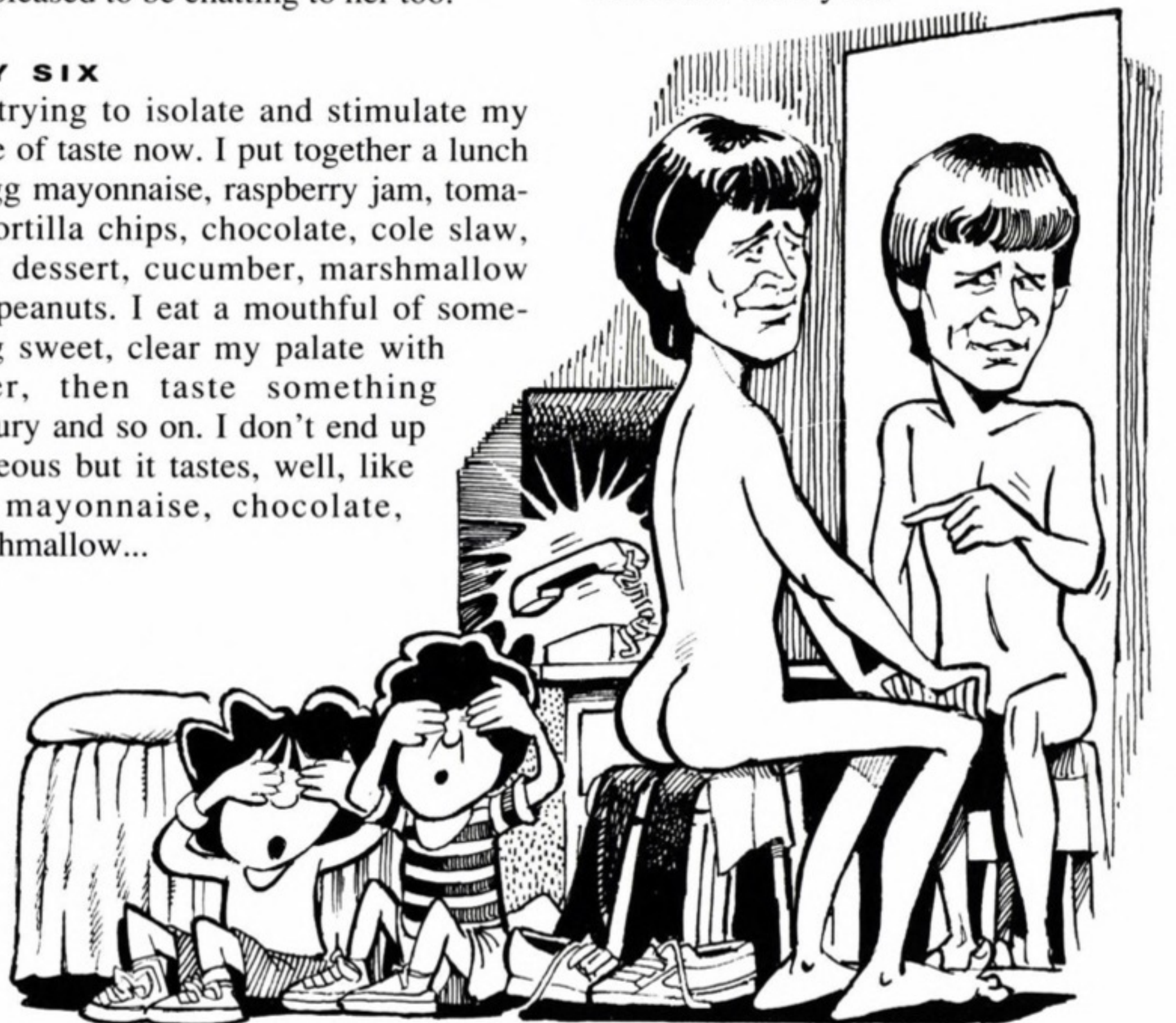


ILLUSTRATION / JIM NEEDLE



HUGO MERCKX / CAMERA PRESS

Order out of chaos: from yarrow stalks in China to bones like these in Africa, fallen objects form a random pattern which diviners then interpret.

Sleepwalking

*Traditional African magic is just ignorant superstition, thought **Debbie Taylor** when she first lived there. Now she takes a different view.*

I can remember the children so clearly. Dusty black skin; tight curls; tiny noses crusted with yellow snot; coughing and crying, all smelling of puppies and woodsmoke. I had to pry them away from their mothers to weigh them. It was a way of quantifying the effect of the drought: counting the number of under-fives who weighed 40 per cent less than normal. But that's another story. Or, rather, that was the only story I was interested in at the time. They were poor, hungry, sickly babies and

I was part of a process that was supposed to save their lives.

I noticed the beads because a nurse at the clinic was trying to make the mothers take them off their children. The babies were so thin: light and fragile, like birds. I suppose she thought the weight of the beads would distort my important calculations.

The mothers all began unknotting thin leather thongs and twisted cotton thread from around the wrists, necks, ankles and waists of their offspring. No-one argued or

complained. I suppose they thought they wouldn't get any cornmeal or milk-powder if they made a fuss. But they were unhappy about it, I could see, though I was too busy then – with important things – to ask why.

I'd noticed the beads many times: every rural person in that part of Africa seemed to wear a necklace or bracelet of some kind. You could buy them in tourist shops in all the cities. They were 'local crafts': baskets and clay pots; batiks and printed cotton; drums and thumb-pianos. Bangles

and beads. Pretty things: they looked nice in our houses or on our pale bodies.

I was living in a traditional village in Botswana, in two thatched mud huts decorated with the geometric coloured clay designs of the local tribe. Expatriate friends from the city used to drive out to visit me at weekends, admiring my picturesque home, wondering how I managed without electricity and running water. They would sit beneath the huge syringa tree with me, staring out at the sun-bleached landscape, drinking tepid sweet red wine from South Africa.

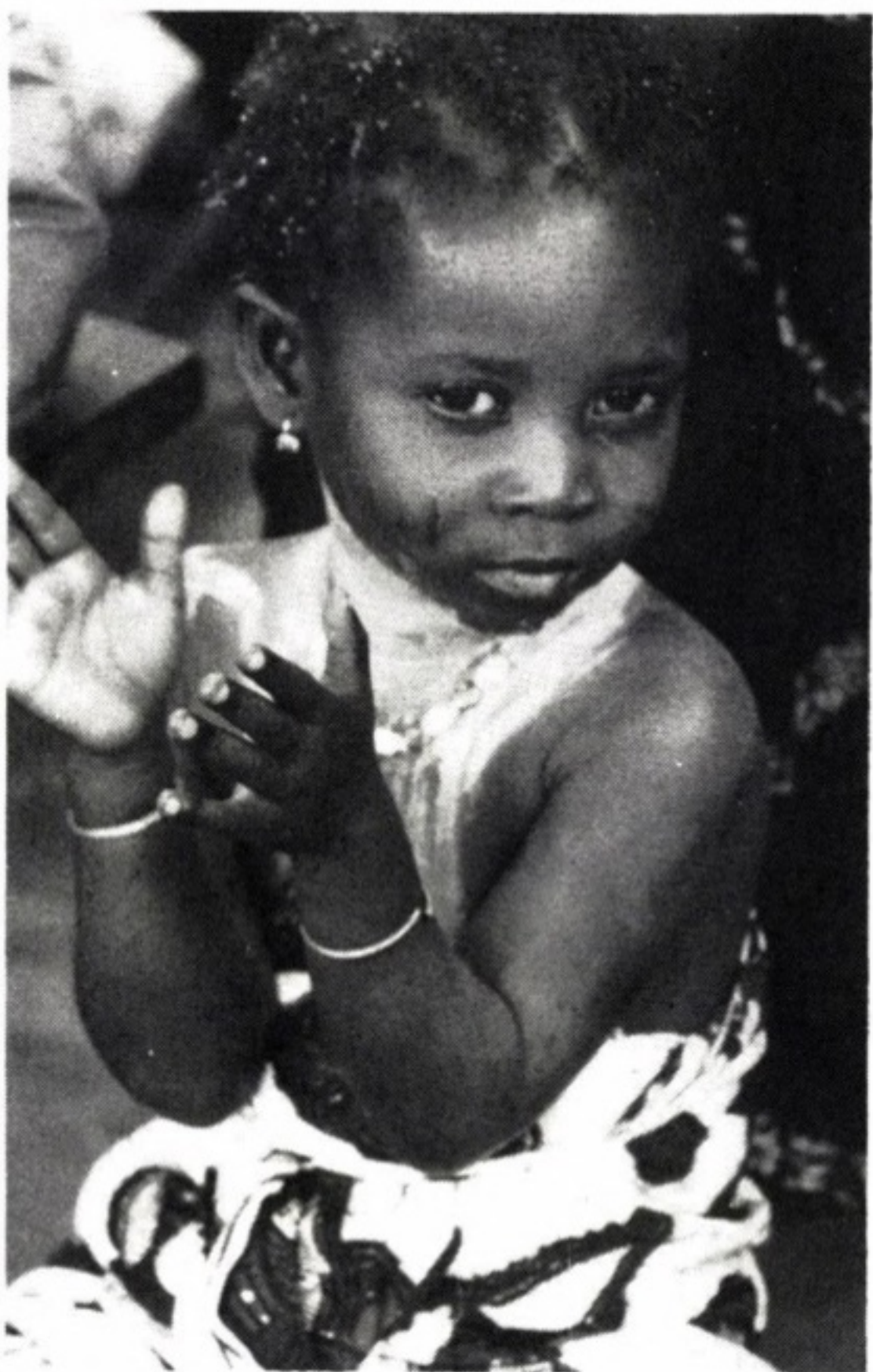
I remember sitting there one evening, after they'd gone, and Femina arriving with a bucket of water to help me wash up. She put her arms round the trunk of the syringa and patted it affectionately.

'This is a famous big tree,' she said. 'The old ones can see it from far in the bush when they want to fly home.' 'The old ones?' 'The grandmothers and grandfathers who have passed away. They like this tree. You know, there are very many old people buried under these houses. Long ago people made the graves in the floors so their ancestors would always be with them.'

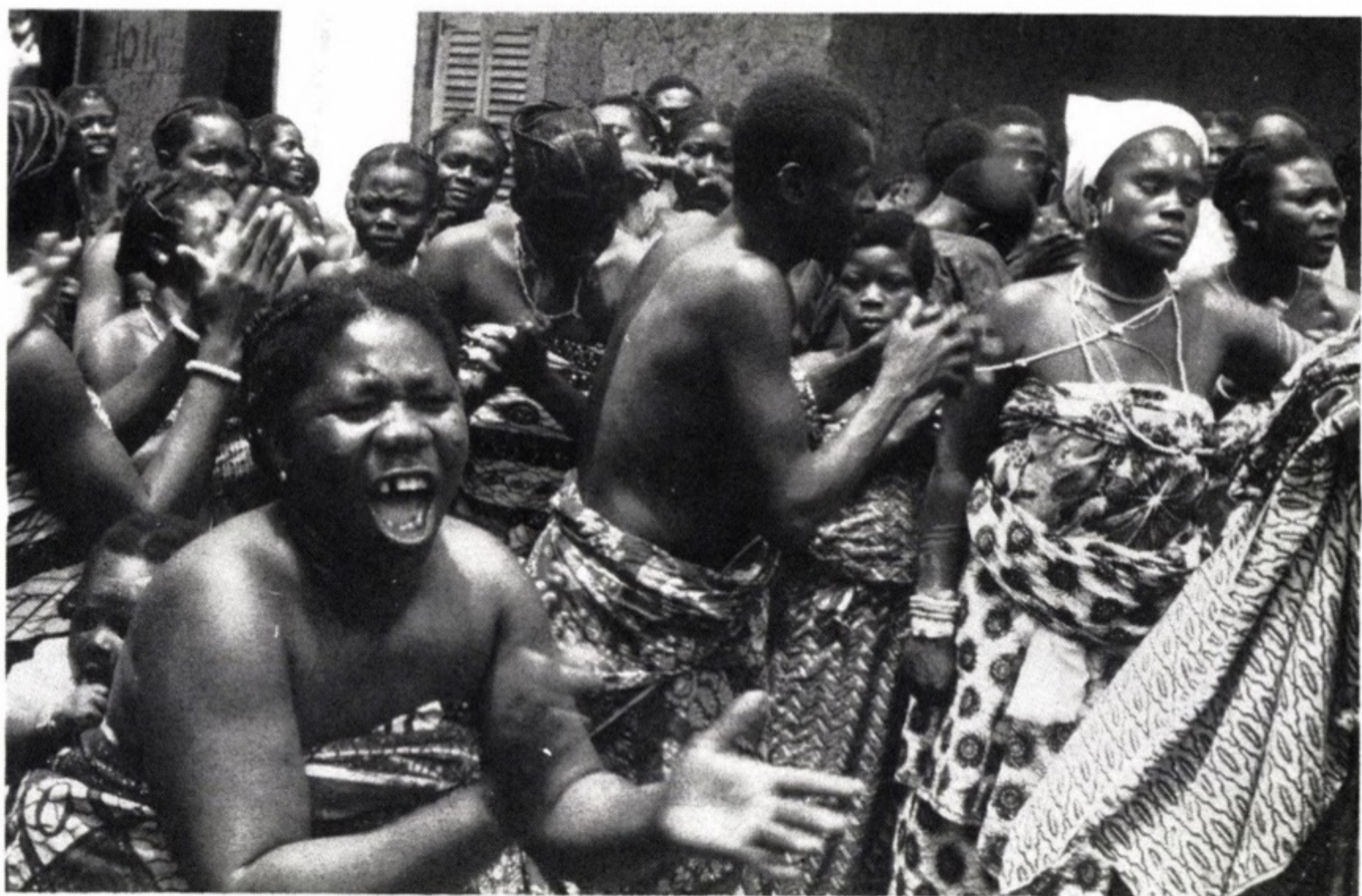
'You mean there are dead people under my bed?' And I rolled my eyes comically, incredulous, to make her laugh. Then I simply put it out of my mind. The next week I was woken by a commotion in the middle of the night. Femina was running naked through the village with strange teeth-marks on her neck and cheek. She wouldn't tell me what had happened to her.



I was like a sleepwalker when I lived in Africa. The evidence was there – *they* were



JOHN MOSS / CAMERA PRESS



JOHN MOSS / CAMERA PRESS

Spirit of fervour. At a ritual healing ceremony in Ghana, people dance and chant so as to frighten an evil spirit out of a woman's body (above and below).

there – all around for me to see. But I was always looking at something else.

And it went on for years, this sleepwalking, this being only half there. I changed my partner; I changed my career, from scientist to journalist. I travelled across the continent of Africa, writing articles and researching films.

I didn't know I was sleepwalking, of course. The sleepwalker never does. I thought I was becoming an expert on African life. And I was, in a way: in those aspects of life I was looking at. I had been trained, you see, from an early age, only to look at certain things: objective facts, material objects, logical possibilities. I was a child of the Enlightenment. Thanks to Diderot and Hume and the other eighteenth-century philosophers – who outlawed credence in the incredible and enthroned reason as our dry interrogator – thanks to those great men, I was enlightened.

Actually we are all enlightened in the West. It's unavoidable. Enlightenment is a *sine qua non* of what we think of as civilization. Without it, we would 'still' be 'primitive', by which I mean superstitious, illogical, in the dark.



It wasn't until six years later that I discovered why the women had been so reluctant to strip the children of their beads. In another change of career – this time from journalist to novelist – I had gone back to research a book about a traditional healer. I wanted to find a woman whose confidence in her centuries-old skills was being challenged by the modern midwifery training she was receiving at the clinic. I was interested in

the clash between those two worlds: her world of crumbling leaves and wizened roots, of spirits and curses and communion with the ancestors – and my world of telephones, timetables and transfusions.

I found the woman I was looking for. Her name was Mai Mutasa. But she wasn't at all as I had expected. I suppose I had envisaged someone picturesque, like an object in a craft shop; someone round and kindly and charismatic. Instead she was skinny and cantankerous; evasive, eccentric.

When we first met she was wearing a string of red beads around her neck and a scarf round her head, patterned with red, white and black. I remember saying something complimentary about the beads through my interpreter: smiling, trying to be friendly. I remember she nodded regally, explaining that both the beads and scarf had been given to her after a *bira* or seance during which she was possessed by the spirit of a dead aunt. The beads signified she was a spirit medium; they were the reason she was such a respected healer. Every time she was called on to help a sick child or a mother in labour, the spirit of her aunt would come and occupy her body, would guide her hands.

She had a grandchild living with her, a long-legged wee fawn of a girl named Margaret. I asked about the necklace she wore too: a tiny grubby cotton package on a much-mended string of coloured beads. This was a *chifumuro*, said Mai Mutasa, pulling the little girl onto her knee; a charm to protect against *mamepho*, or bad air. Bad air was particularly dangerous to young children and pregnant women. They should wear a *chifumuro* at all times, especially when travelling among strangers.

I remember looking at the beads, roughly knotted under their ragged clothes, and experiencing a kind of double-take: seeing them once, then seeing them again, somehow transformed by my knowledge of their meaning. I felt confused and disoriented suddenly, like Alice stepping through the looking glass. Everything looked familiar but I couldn't be sure that I understood what I was seeing any more. In my notes I wrote: 'not believing doesn't mean it isn't true'. And then: 'not believing is as much an act of faith as believing'.



The beads were just the beginning. Once I was willing to look, I was overwhelmed by what I suppose I should now call the paranormal.

There was the young woman I met who woke one morning to find a cross had been cut into her pubic hair. There was the tobacco picker with black-and-white beads round her wrist, who pranced sideways on her hands and feet, barking, possessed by the spirit of a hyena. And the old *nganga* (healer) possessed by his father's spirit, who had survived five deadly snake-bites and who cured epilepsy with herbs and the shadow of a tall gourd. He told me his remedy was being investigated by the World Health Organization. Then there was the scar on my interpreter's belly, where an Apostolic healer had reached in with his bare hands and extracted a ball of beaks, claws and feathers put there as a curse by a jealous neighbour. And the school that had to be closed because pint-sized poltergeists known as *svikero* were running riot inside

and had reduced the piano to matchwood.

Then there were the things that I actually experienced myself: less dramatic, but obviously more dramatic to me. My car's headlights going out in the middle of the wilderness as I drove between two haunted rocks; seeing water fail to fall from an inverted gourd; finding a dead chicken in a closed hut, with its feet inexplicably removed; my menstrual periods stopping as though I was pregnant for the nine months it took to write the novel. And on and on: more extraordinary people, more extraordinary happenings, than I could ever describe in these few pages.

To begin with it was like watching a horror movie. I was looking, but I was still searching for logical explanations, still enlightened, still outside what I was seeing. I had discovered the value of the beads to the people I was living with, but they hadn't yet become valuable to me.

The change came gradually, like wading into a pool. The first footsteps had been cold, shocking. Then I was paddling happily in the shallows, enjoying the thrills, the sunshine. Then suddenly I found that the water was up round my shoulders and tugging at my feet. Looking back over my shoulder, the dry land of enlightenment seemed a long way away. Then I realized it wasn't a pool I was wading in, but a sea; the dry land I had left was just a tiny island surrounded by a sea of other meanings, other normalities. I had assumed that the land was all-encompassing.

I stood there, frightened, looking in both directions. I could wade back to safety, to civilization. Or I could try and swim.



A month later, in a wine bar in the East End of London, my handbag was stolen. It was hanging over the back of my chair with my wallet and my filofax inside it, plus my car keys and credit cards. I remember the thud of panic as I crouched to look under the table, through the forest of well-clad legs. I ran to look in the toilets; I asked all the waiters. But it was gone.

I could replace everything of course: telephone the bank, my insurers, various credit-card companies; get a mechanic to change the lock on my car. But the panic stayed with me through all this sensible practical activity because buried deep in the corner of the wallet was a little wizened piece of root – my *chifumuro*.

Mai Mutasa had given it to me. Usually people stitch it into a little piece of cloth and hang it around their necks. I hadn't had time to do that with mine and now it had gone. ■

A former *NI* co-editor, **Debbie Taylor** is the author of the novel *The Children Who Sleep By The River*. She is currently working on a novel about her experience of magic in Africa.

The spirits of the sky

Davi Kopenawa Yanomami is a respected campaigner for the people of the Amazon rainforest. But he is also a shaman. Here he talks about his initiation

It was when I was a small child that I first saw the *shabiribë* shamanic spirits. I had never seen them before and I was very frightened. I couldn't get to sleep. My stepfather, who is a great shaman, had given me some (hallucinogenic) *yakoana* powder at the end of a *reahu* death festival – that's why the spirits came. They came from far away like a blinding light in my sleep. There were many of them and they made a clamour like a group of Yanomami shouting in chorus on the way to a festival – it was frightening and I wanted to flee. But my stepfather said 'Don't be afraid! These are shamanic spirits that you're seeing. When you grow up, if you really want to take *yakoana* I'll initiate you and you will become a shaman.'

As I grew up I continued to see spirits in my sleep all the time. I never slept without seeing them. People asked me 'What's happening? Are you becoming a shaman?' But it was only when I'd become an adult that I asked to be initiated as a shaman.

It's here among the 'people of the mountain of wind' (his wife's people) that I was initiated. My father-in-law initiated me – he prepared the powder and blew it up my nose several times so that I completely lost consciousness. I was really dead! (he laughs.) I'd never taken so much before and didn't know the full power of *yakoana*. I was squatting and suddenly I tumbled on to my back, quite stiff: 'Kurai!' – and I began to whine 'ee ee ee'. I took so much *yakoana* that my spectre was outside my body for a very long time.

My father-in-law had prepared me, he'd said: 'Your thoughts must be calm. Don't eat or drink. Just answer the *shabiribë* spirits truly or they will kill you.' At the start I only heard a very weak sound. But I answered it, singing as they did, and I heard they were satisfied. The path of the spirits became very visible – it came

from far, far away, beyond the waters, beyond even your country. But it was very brilliant.

The *shabiribë* decorate their hair with white down and wear black bands made of monkey tails. Their collective houses are very tall, like hills in the sky. They wear feather armbands. They brandish their machetes, which are magnificent – and it's with these that they strike the initiates. They bring with them huge mirrors which they put on the ground and dance on very slowly, back and forth. Then suddenly they lift their machetes and hit you in the back: 'thaiiii!' You tumble down on to the ground and stay there as if dead while they carry on dancing. They cut off your head and take away your tongue to give it their way of singing. Then they put back your head upside down on your body.

I wanted to be initiated as a shaman in my turn so as to continue when these elders die, so as not to stay alone without knowing anything about the *shabiribë*. If you eat too much or copulate with

women too much you won't ever become a shaman. Your thought stays blocked, you don't see the spirits. That's why I asked the elders to initiate me – I wanted my thought to be able to grow in all directions.

So that's how I was initiated. At the start when I didn't know anything I thought about my father-in-law 'perhaps he's lying and tricking us'. Now I've also seen these things I can't think the elders lie. I tell myself 'Yes, it's true! The elders really were great shamans'. And I still have much to learn. I am impatient to continue. When I finish having to go into the whites' lands all the time I will ask my father-in-law to make me inhale his powder again. I want to ask a lot more of his shamanic spirits.

Davi Kopenawa Yanomami was talking to French anthropologist Bruce Albert.



On the trail of the spirits



ILLUSTRATION / JIM NEEDLE

THE idea that it's possible to communicate with spirits is probably considered the most wacky area of the paranormal in the West. Yet this is readily accepted in communities right across the Third World. And it has lately become a vogue subject for serious literary concern, as in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits*.

I had two elements of personal interest in investigating 'spirit communication' which I should 'declare'. Family legend has it that my great-aunt Muriel was a medium who channelled for the spirit of an artist called Hugo. When under his influence she was said to create the most wonderful pictures in a matter of seconds – but gave up when my mother (then a child) took fright at the idea. And my only personal brush with the paranormal came at 14 when I spent a whole night at a *Ouija* board seeing the most detailed messages spelled out with astonishing speed and violence. I've always wondered what was the 'truth' behind these events.

So I started visiting mediums. The

very first one I met seemed to give a pretty accurate reading of my character; he was also specific that he was receiving information from a great-grandfather who took a special interest in me. He couldn't offer me a name (why not?) but gave a description: a portly man wearing a tweed jacket and pocket watch and holding up a rose to signify his interest in gardening. One of my great-grandfathers fitted this description – though so did just about every other middle-class

Englishman at the turn of the century. But if there was anything to this idea then he ought surely to have popped up again flashing his rose and pocket watch when I consulted other psychics.

He never did. A couple of mediums were honest enough to say that they couldn't pick up enough to make the sitting worthwhile and refunded my money. Others were impressive character analysts but failed to deliver anything you might consider 'evidential'. Still others seemed sadly deluded, like the man who told me at length about his numerous encounters with – wait for it – Joan of Arc, the Angel Gabriel, the Virgin Mary and Christ himself.

I was bombarded with the names of people anxious to speak to me and give me messages yet not one of those names ever meant anything to me – and I am pretty well acquainted with my own family tree back into the last century. I was offered all kinds of plausible predictions about my future work yet the same prediction never recurred. My own spirit guide was described variously as an old Chinese healer with a typical goatee beard, a Native American and a small man who looked like he might hail from an island in the South Pacific.

The (anti-)climax of this particular phase of investigation came when I saw a medium with reportedly fantastic powers. She bewildered me with her rapid-fire offer of a vast range of spirits who seemed to be zipping in and out the room like lightning. She gave each one a name but when none of them meant anything to me they got on their bikes again, as if she was just fishing to get lucky with a name.

Later I sent a colleague back to see her and we compared notes. She'd rung almost exactly the same bells, diverging only when my colleague, who is passionate about Native American culture, showed an interest in the idea that he had

a Red Indian guide (Crazy Horse himself, of course, who was his uncle in a past life). The coup de grâce came when she said both he and I had been connected in a past life with Mary Queen of Scots.

After experiences like this I could have been forgiven for throwing 'open-mindedness' to the four winds – there was clearly plenty of fraud and self-delusion at work here. But at the same time I encountered eminently trustworthy people who testified to the most remarkable paranormal experiences. Take Charlie, a 74-year-old Christian Spiritualist from London.

I trust Charlie: I doubt that I have met a man less capable of duplicity. He could have deluded himself about some things, of course, through too great a willingness to believe: gullibility is a common hazard in this area. But does that mean I should flatly disbelieve everything he tells me? What, for example, are we to make of this?

'A few years ago I found myself thinking about this woman I knew who was working in Saudi Arabia. I'm sitting here at three o'clock in the afternoon and in my mind I see her coming out of her house and get into an army staff car. A tall Eurasian officer goes with her and they drive off into the Sahara followed by a convoy of trucks full of Arab soldiers. She's the only white person, the only woman, and I feel worried about her. I see her arrive in a village where the people are unlike any I'd seen in her photographs – all dressed in black so that you can just see their eyes, both men and women. The officer walks with her into a house at the centre of the village and at that I breathe a sigh of relief.

'I didn't see her in the flesh until she came back on leave two months later. I told her what I'd seen and she confirmed every detail. She said the people in the village had been Bedouins rather than the normal Arabs I'd seen in her slides and she said I'd been relieved when she'd entered the house because it belonged to the local police chief. So you don't have to be in the next world to pick up people.'

Most of the paranormal experiences Charlie relates emerge directly out of his belief in a hierarchical spirit world through which we progress towards 'The Light' by reincarnation – the parallel with Eastern religions like Buddhism seems very clear. But this last incident is anecdotal evidence of what parapsychologists call 'remote viewing' – it is one of the extrasensory powers currently being tested in laboratory conditions, as the next piece explains.



MORT ENGEL

Twilight zone. A subject in the *ganzfeld*: a state of mild sensory isolation which aids research into ESP.

Future science or science fiction?

*If your capacity for blind faith is limited, fair enough. Paranormal phenomena are now being tested in rigorous scientific conditions, as parapsychologist **Richard Broughton** explains.*

IN a quiet room senior scientist Russell Targ got off the phone and handed a slip of paper to Ingo Swann, artist, psychic and subject in a curious research project. On the paper was written '49°20'S, 70°14'E'. Swann looked at the numbers, closed his eyes, and in a few moments began to speak: 'My initial response is that it's an island... Terrain seems rocky... I see some buildings rather mathematically laid out. One of them is orange. There is something like a radar antenna, a round disk. Two white cylindrical tanks, quite large. To the north-west, a small airstrip...' Continuing to talk, Swann began to draw an island, annotat-

ing the coastline as he went and describing natural and human-made features.

By the time he had finished, Swann had given a pretty good description of Kerguelen, a small French-administered island in the southern Indian Ocean. The layout of the buildings and the equipment could have been that of a joint French-Soviet meteorological installation on the island. You can see why the US Government was prepared to pick up the tab for the project.¹

'Come on,' you say, 'Psychic spying... Give me a break! Even the CIA isn't that silly.'

OK. It wasn't psychic spying, but it was

close. The scientists who worked on the project called it *remote viewing*. The independent intelligence expert called in by the CIA to evaluate the work said that remote viewing was not sufficiently reliable to replace traditional intelligence-gathering methods, *but it could serve as a useful adjunct*.

Remote viewing remains one of the more flamboyant episodes in the controversial science known as parapsychology. As far as I know, remote viewing has not become part of the CIA's bag of tricks, yet late last year there were reports in the US press that a shadowy business outfit called Psi Tech was attempting to use remote viewing to locate biological and chemical weapon depots in

Iraq. One might be inclined to dismiss Psi Tech as just another bunch of crackpots, except that many of the principals are high-ranking ex-military types and everyone that works for the firm is reported to have high-level security clearance.

Image problems

As a parapsychologist, I'm not usually associated with psychic spying. In fact, for many years after the popular 1984 film *Ghostbusters* the most common question I got from younger audiences was 'Did you ever get slimed?' Much to their disappointment, not only had I never been slimed, but I had never chased a ghost.

Parapsychology has been a laboratory science ever since JB Rhine started his research at the US's Duke University in 1930. Rhine used the term to separate the phenomena that seemed like human abilities – like ESP – from the spirits and séance rooms of its precursor, psychical research.

Rhine began testing for extrasensory perception (ESP) by means of card-guessing experiments. Subjects attempted to guess the order of five symbols in decks of specially designed cards. The results had to be evaluated statistically – not as much fun as a séance, but a great deal more satisfying for scientists. Later Rhine began looking for evidence of *psychokinesis* – the apparent ability some people have to affect objects by the power of mind alone – by seeing if they could affect tumbling dice.

Of course Rhine and his colleagues came

in for a huge amount of criticism. But he weathered all the attacks. The Institute for Mathematical Statistics pronounced his statistics sound. If the experimental methods needed improvement, he improved them. By the time World War Two ended, parapsychology had won a small and somewhat grudging acceptance in academic circles.

The Duke lab set the model for parapsychology research for the next few decades. Experimental design improved, statistics became more sophisticated, and eventually the field became a whole lot more technological. In short, parapsychology simply followed the same path that many other sciences trod.

So why aren't we rich (or at least better accepted)?

If you believe the pronouncements of some claiming to represent mainstream science then parapsychology is not a science at all, but merely a delusional belief system supported by faulty observation and lousy experiments. As elsewhere in the realm of human existence, you would do well to question such facile generalizations.

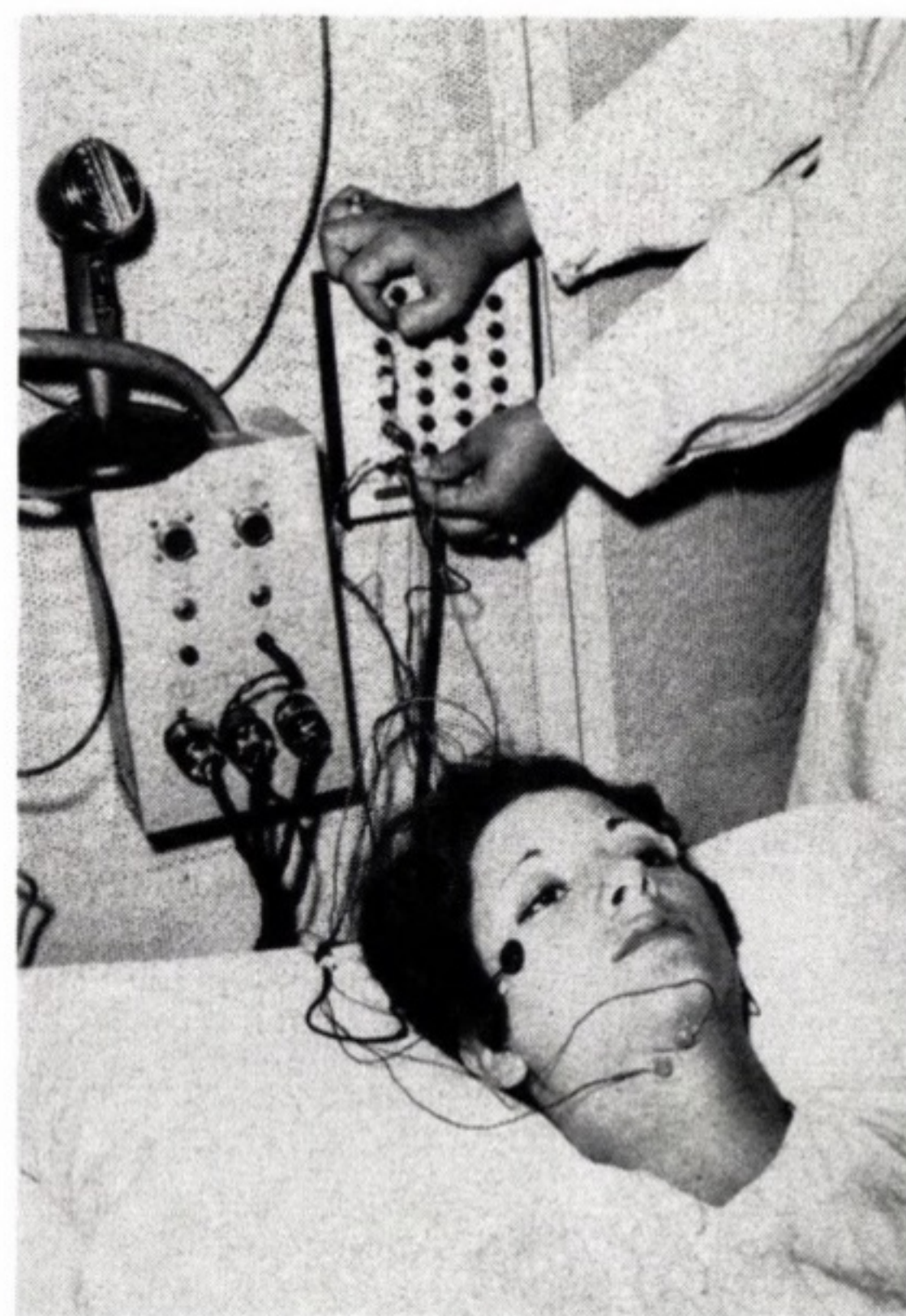
More than any other branch of science, parapsychology has endured intense critical scrutiny for over half a century. Scientists in this field are no more interested in wasting their time than scientists of any other ilk. They have the same training and credentials as their peers but, like the members of any minority group, they know that their efforts have to be better than the best of the majority.

ESP in the twilight zone

In a small soundproofed room a researcher looks at a TV screen. On it is a 1950s Christmas-season ad for Coca-Cola. A classic Santa Claus figure holds a bottle of Coke in his left hand and behind him an oversize bottle cap displays the Coca-Cola logo.

Meanwhile in a massive acoustic isolation chamber a subject listens to white noise (a sort of electronic hiss) while stretched out comfortably on a reclining chair. Translucent hemispheres cover his eyes and he is bathed in red light, leaving him with a relaxed, warm feeling. In a few moments he begins: *'There's a man with a dark beard and he has a sharp face... I can see his hat and he has a sack over his shoulder... Window ledge is looking down and there's a billboard that says Coca-Cola on it... There's a snowman... There's a white beard again. There's an old man with a white beard...'*

This is just one of several hundred ESP trials conducted by Charles Honorton and his research team in Princeton, New Jersey. They employ the *ganzfeld* – a mild state of sensory isolation which typically induces a hypnogogic or 'almost asleep' condition. In the ESP part of the test the subject freely describes whatever thoughts, images, mem-



MARY EVANS / THE CUTTEN COLLECTION

Wired for wonder. A dream telepathy experiment at the Maimonides Lab in Brooklyn.

ories come to mind during the 30-minute session. At the end of the session, the subject chooses which one of four pictures they thought had been their target.

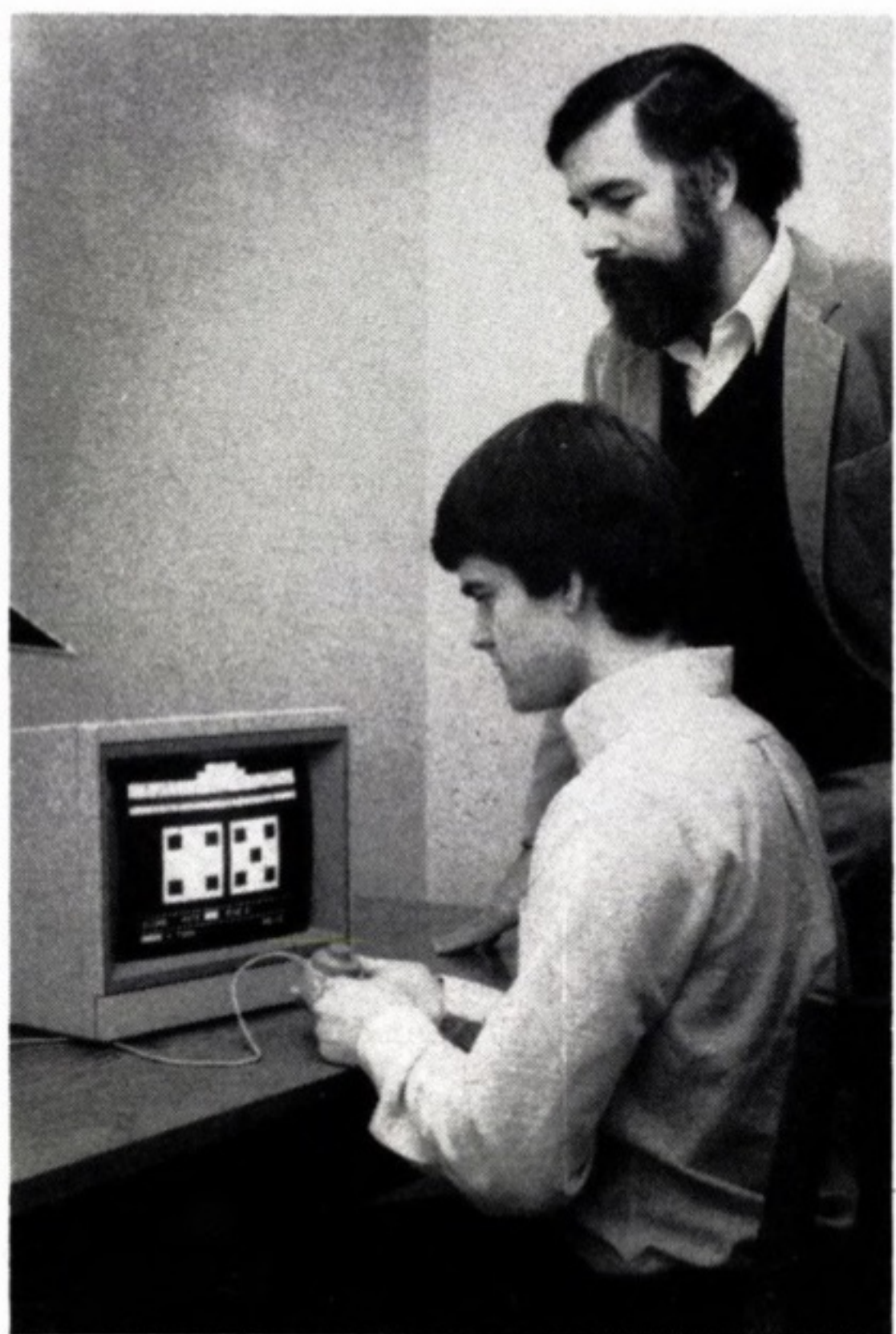
The ESP-ganzfeld research is confounding critics who look for excuses to dismiss parapsychology. By the early 1980s, some 42 ganzfeld studies had been published. An amazingly high number of them showed ESP success and they became the subject of a debate between Honorton and leading critic Ray Hyman, who claimed that potential weaknesses in methodology could reduce the 'true' rate of success to something close to chance.² At this point an independent expert was commissioned by the US Government's National Research Council to evaluate parapsychology. He concluded that there was unquestionably a real ESP effect shown in the data.

In 1989, Honorton's team published the results of 11 new studies that met criteria they had agreed upon with critic Hyman. The overall scoring rate was 34 per cent, compared to the 25 per cent that chance predicted – very significant statistically. The myth that parapsychology has no repeatable experiments had finally been put to rest.³

On the quantum frontier

As my assistant brought me to the hall I could tell he was concerned that the experiment was getting out of hand. At first we heard only the beeps and clicks of the computer. Suddenly, a full-blown rebel-yell 'Yeehaa!' echoed through the hall. 'Say your prayers, buddy – I'm

Computer game with a twist: the author overseeing research into 'micro-PK'.



FOUNDATION FOR RESEARCH ON THE NATURE OF MAN

gonna blow you away!’

Our subject had been playing what appeared to be a slightly dated computerized dice game but was in fact a very sophisticated test of psychokinesis. Built into the computer was a specially designed device producing true random events that could be traced back to quantum mechanical processes and formed the basis for our computerized dice. We were looking for evidence that our subjects could shift the chance distribution of events so as to let them win the game more frequently. The only way this could happen was if they somehow influenced the quantum processes behind it all – psychokinesis at the sub-atomic level.

The yelling? Well, to heighten motivation we told our subjects a small lie. We said our computer was linked by telephone to an identical unit in the rival University of North Carolina and this was basketball season, a time when certain primal competitive urges well up in students in this part of the world.

We have completed three separate experiments with this set-up. In each one, the subjects who were comfortable with the competition did better in the simulated contest than those who were ill at ease. Nothing surprising about that, except when you consider that it was not a game of skill. There was no possible way our subjects could influence their scores by *normal* means.

Our dice game is just one variant in a class of experiments that dominates parapsychological research today. Known as ‘micro-PK’ experiments, these study the direct influence of consciousness on probabilistic physical systems – in other words the pure chance processes of nature described by quantum mechanics. These

experiments tend to be highly automated and secure, and even some of parapsychology’s severest critics have acknowledged that the micro-PK research is hard to fault on methodological grounds.

Micro-PK research has put a different twist on our ideas about psychokinesis, one that has begun to interest physicists. The evidence suggests that human consciousness is somehow able to bias the probabilities of events that occur in the atomic world. This has important implications for theorists grappling with what is known as the ‘measurement problem’ in quantum physics. Some leading physicists believe that consciousness actually helps determine reality at the quantum level, and a few are beginning to wonder if parapsychologists’ micro-PK experiments are providing empirical evidence of this.⁴

Where’s the breakthrough?

There has been a breakthrough in parapsychology recently, but it is hard to get people too excited about it. Perhaps that is because it is essentially a statistical breakthrough – *meta-analysis*, a collection of procedures used to assess whole domains of research in the social sciences and medicine. When meta-analysis was applied to parapsychology the results astounded everyone. In virtually every case it has shown parapsychological effects to be reliable, consistent and massively significant in statistical terms.

The large base of micro-PK studies provides a good example. In 1989, two Princeton University researchers published meta-analysis of every micro-PK study that they could locate. The meta-analysis revealed an overall effect that was small, but extremely significant. In statistical

terms, the odds against chance as an explanation were about 100,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (or 10^{35}) to 1. The authors showed that there was no relationship between the quality of the study and the results, thereby refuting the frequent claim by critics that poor studies give results while good ones do not.

The crystal ball

The *data* of parapsychology is looking better than ever but the infrastructure of the field is in sad shape. There are only about a dozen laboratories in the West doing any serious work in parapsychology and most of these are pathetically underfunded.

If parapsychology is to be rescued from the research doldrums the driving forces are likely to be familiar ones: corporate profit and national self-interest. In the US one major telecommunications company has funded a modest research project to see if the very weak effects found in micro-PK can be coupled with the latest in neural-net and other pattern-recognition computer programs. The goal: to produce a psychic switch – a device that responds to mental intention. Reports in the business press indicate that Japan also has a growing interest in ‘mental technology’.

The only country in the world which has a nationally supported research program on parapsychology is China. Of primary interest to Chinese scientists are a variety of healing and psychokinesis-like phenomena associated with the practice of *gigong*, an ancient meditation and breath-control discipline. One of China’s leading scientists, Qian Xuesen, has declared this research to be a top priority for the nation’s scientists and some of the facilities of China’s former space program have been given over to it.

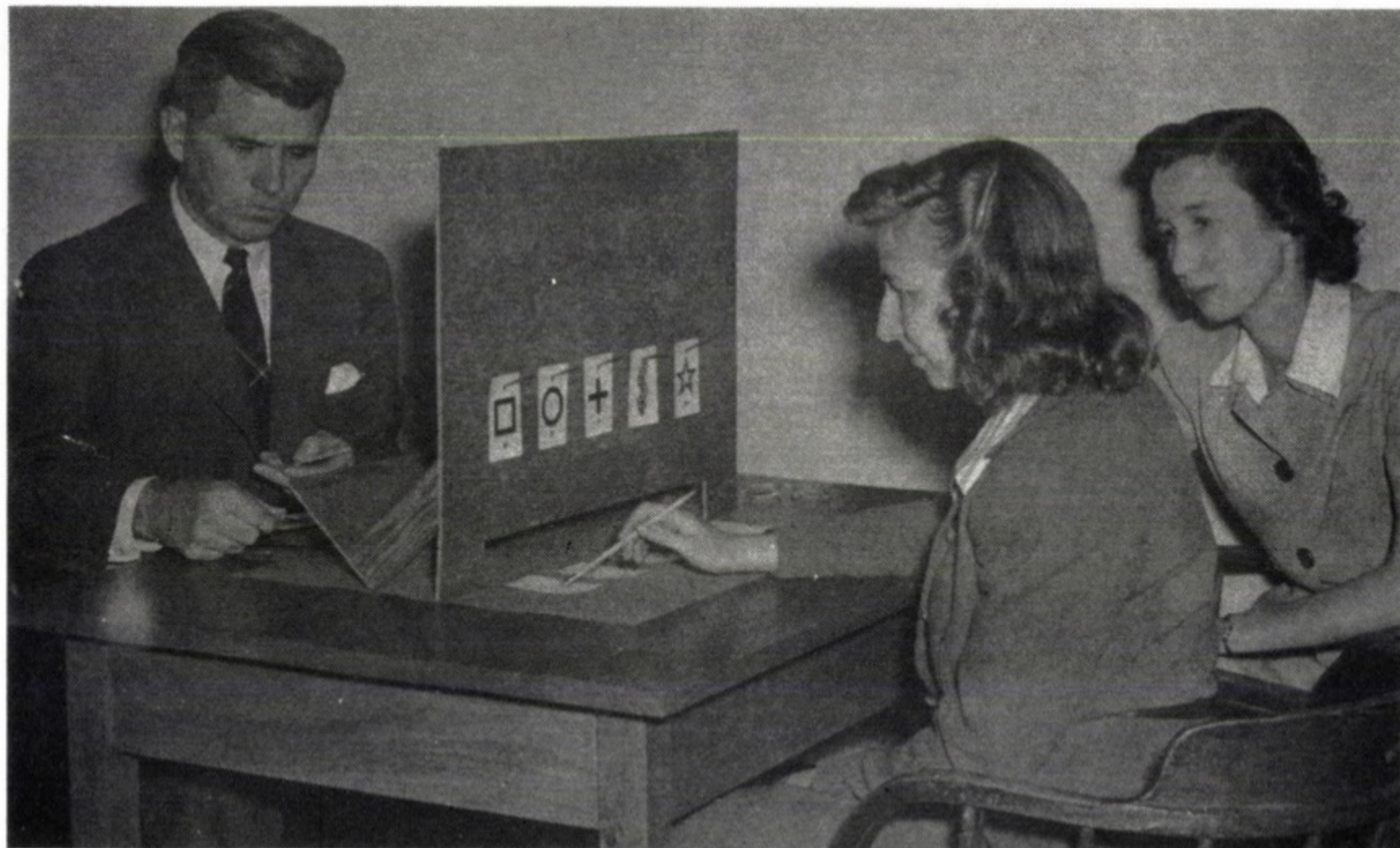
Will parapsychology succumb to corporate greed or national pride? Will mental technology be a boon or a bane to humankind? History might incline us to fear the worst, but at least in the psychic field all nations and all races seem to be equally endowed with natural resources.

For a long time parapsychology could do little more than convince some of us that those curious human abilities that we label psychic are real. Now it is beginning to look like the secrets of psychic abilities and their application will be available to those who commit the necessary resources to unlocking them. ■

Richard Broughton is Director of Research at the Institute for Parapsychology in North Carolina. He is the author of *Parapsychology: The Controversial Science*.

¹ Russell Targ and Harold E Puthoff, *Mind-Reach* (Delacourt Press 1977). ² *Journal of Parapsychology* (Vol 49, No 1, 1985). ³ ‘Psi Communication in the Ganzfeld’, *Journal of Parapsychology*, (Vol 54, No 2, 1990). ⁴ ‘Collapse of the State Vector and Psychokinetic Effects’, *Foundations of Physics*, (Vol 12, 1982).

Parapsychology’s pioneer: JB Rhine conducting one of the earliest ESP experiments in the 1930s.



Shamanism

Definition: The religious belief in magic and communication with spirits as practised by diviners in communities all over the world from Siberian shamans, through African 'witch doctors' to Native American 'medicine men'.



- Stories abound of early contact between sceptical Westerners and tribal shamans. Father Boilat, a French missionary in Senegal, recalled how he tried to expose a local diviner. Required to formulate a question in his mind and then spit it out into a heap of sand he spat but put no question – and was given no answer. When he did silently formulate a question he was told 'You will receive the papers you are expecting from your country in 15 days'. This turned out to be exactly right.
- Hunter David Leslie was told by a Zulu diviner exactly what had happened to all eight of his native hunters who were scattered over 200 miles: one had been killed by elephants, one had died of fever, one had killed four elephants and so on. 'To my utter amazement it turned out correct in every particular.'

Clairvoyance

Definition: Receiving visual information (often about far distant events) via the mind rather than the eyes. Clairaudience and clairsentience are related phenomena which involve hearing and feeling things parapsychically.

- The most celebrated example of clairvoyance was that by Emmanuel Swedenborg, on 19 July 1759, who described in vivid detail to a reception full

of local notables in Göteborg the progress of a disastrous fire which was sweeping through Stockholm, 300 miles away. At six he told them the fire had just broken out; at eight he told them it had been extinguished only three doors from his home. Two days later a messenger from Stockholm confirmed every detail.

- In modern times the most celebrated clairvoyant was Gerald Croiset, who worked successfully with the Dutch police on many missing persons cases in the 1950s and 1960s.

Dowsing

Definition: The detection of (underground) resources by paranormal means.

- US Marines in Vietnam had marked success in dowsing with coathangers to detect tunnels used by the Vietcong.
- In the 1970s a dowser was officially appointed to Canada's Agriculture Ministry.
- The pharmaceutical multinational Hoffmann-LaRoche employs a dowser

whenever it sites new factories. When asked to comment on this in the 1980s a company spokesperson Dr Peter Treadwell said: 'We use methods which are profitable, whether they are scientifically explainable or not. The dowsing method pays off.'



Poltergeists

Definition: From the German meaning 'noisy and boisterous ghost'. The (often violent) movement of objects by unknown forces, associated with a particular place.

- Investigators have found that an individual adolescent is commonly the unconscious focus for these events. Parapsychologists now believe the

phenomena are a form of 'exteriorized psychokinesis' related to the emotional turmoil of adolescence.

- In 1849 the official magazine of the French police described how a house in Paris was assailed every night by a hail of projectiles which did serious damage to its front. Police patrolled the whole area with dogs and watched from rooftops but could find no source – the projectiles rained in over their heads onto the one house with mathematical precision.

- In 1967 a lawyer's office in the German town of Rosenheim became famous for its poltergeist effects: lights exploded as fluorescent tubes twisted in their sockets; the phone system went haywire. Investigators, including police and two physicists, then filmed plates jumping off the wall, pictures turning on their hooks and filing cabinets moving by themselves. A 19-year-old typist was found to be the focus: when she was removed the effects ceased.



THE WEIRD AND THE WONDERFUL

The term 'paranormal' encompasses a vast range of different phenomena. Here are some of the main kinds of paranormal activity – with examples of how it is claimed they work.

Materializations

Definition: Matter appearing out of nothing.

- The 'physical' mediums of the late nineteenth century claimed to materialize physical forms from ectoplasm, a luminous cloud which would emanate from them and then harden into a form that could be touched. Some of these were plainly frauds; others could not be dismissed so easily.
- Eva C, a French/Algerian woman photographed here with one of her 'materializations', was investigated by Charles Richet, a Nobel prizewinner for physiology. Richet said he watched her images gradually take shape and dismissed the possibility of fraud.
- The most celebrated modern-day medium is the Brazilian Carlos Mirabelli, who has produced full-form materializations of dead relatives who could be spoken with and even touched. He has achieved this in full light and in test conditions, tied up in a sealed room; his exploits have been attested to by scores of prominent Brazilians and there has been no implication of fraud.



Precognition

Definition: Clairvoyance which involves perception of some future event.

- Nostradamus' accurate predictions about the French Revolution are well known. Less known is the gathering of progressive aristocrats just before the Revolution at which the Marquis de Cazotte correctly predicted the fate of all those present – one poisoned himself to avoid the guillotine, four were executed (including Cazotte himself) and the freethinker Jean-Francois LaHarpe (who recorded the prediction) survived and died as a Christian.

- In the 1950s US researcher William Cox examined records of railway accidents in which 10 or more people were injured and found that in every case the train had carried significantly fewer passengers than the average on the same train seven days before. He could think of no other explanation for this than precognition of some kind, possibly unconscious.
- In 1898 the medium Morgan Robertson published the novel *Futility* which featured a new monster liner called the Titan, the largest ever built. It was designed to be unsinkable with 19 watertight compartments yet it sank after hitting an iceberg on its first Atlantic crossing. The Titanic sank 14 years later.

Astrology

Definition: Divination and assessment of character by relating birth times to planetary influences.

- This was the most discredited area of the paranormal until the 1970s research of the Gauquelins. This French husband-and-wife team tried to use statistics to prove how unfounded astrology was but achieved the opposite result. They used the birth dates of thousands of prominent people and found statistically significant correlations between Mars and sportspeople; Saturn and



- scientists; Jupiter and actors.
- The Gauquelins' research was pursued by sceptical psychologist Eysenck. He found that, as astrologists would claim, introverts were more likely to have been born under Saturn and extraverts under Mars or Jupiter.
- The debunking Committee for the Scientific Investigation of the Claims of the Paranormal, launched a 1978 research project which expected to expose the Gauquelins' research as fake. To their embarrassment the same results were achieved and were duly covered up until they were leaked in 1983.

Psychokinesis

Definition: The projection of psychic energy so as to move or influence matter.

- Laboratory tests of 'micro-PK' – the ability of individuals to influence events at the subatomic or quantum level – have been analysed statistically. The odds against chance as an explanation for them are 100,000 million million million million million to one.
- The Israeli Uri Geller is now routinely dismissed as a conjuror. Yet some of his exploits remain remarkable and unexplained. One example is the permanent change he managed to produce under test conditions in the shape of nitinol wire at the Naval Surface Weapons Center in Maryland, a feat which normally requires reshaping under tension at 900°F. This feat of bending nitinol wire was replicated under test conditions by schoolboy Mark Briscoe in 1982.

- The Soviet psychic Nelya Kulagina was tested by a US team in the Khrushchev years. They witnessed her movement and levitation of several small objects when she placed her hands above them. They took elaborate precautions against magnets and concluded that no known force could account for the movements.



Ghosts

Definition: Apparitions of the dead.

- Ghosts haunting particular locations can usefully be separated from 'spirits'. They usually perform the same action over and over, manifesting no awareness of any humans present or any interest in communicating. One theory has it that they are images recorded on the physical place by the emotional or psychic power of a particular event which are then replayed. Hauntings have been commonly referred to throughout human history. The best attested case is that of the Despard family home in

- Cheltenham where a woman in black with a handkerchief to her face appeared to so many people so consistently that it seemed to dispel all doubt.
- Apparitions of dead people have often been supposed to appear via mediums. But they also seem to act independently, as when the poet Wilfred Owen's brother found himself inexplicably depressed amid a ship's celebrations at the end of the First World War. He went down to his cabin and saw Wilfred sitting in his chair with a characteristic expression which turned to a broad smile before he disappeared. The poet had been killed on the last day of the War.

Levitation

Definition: Humans defying the power of gravity.

- The most celebrated levitator in history was St Joseph of Cupertino, a dimwitted monk who would soar into the air whenever he felt religious ecstasy. He had no control over his 'flights', which could last for minutes and were attested to by scores of witnesses from the Pope downwards.
- Magician Harry Kellar enjoyed exposing frauds but was astounded in the 1870s to witness a Zulu witch doctor in trance floating three feet off the ground. He could detect no trick. In 1882 he challenged the medium Eglinton to perform a feat no conjuror could repeat: Eglinton duly levitated Kellar one foot off the ground.



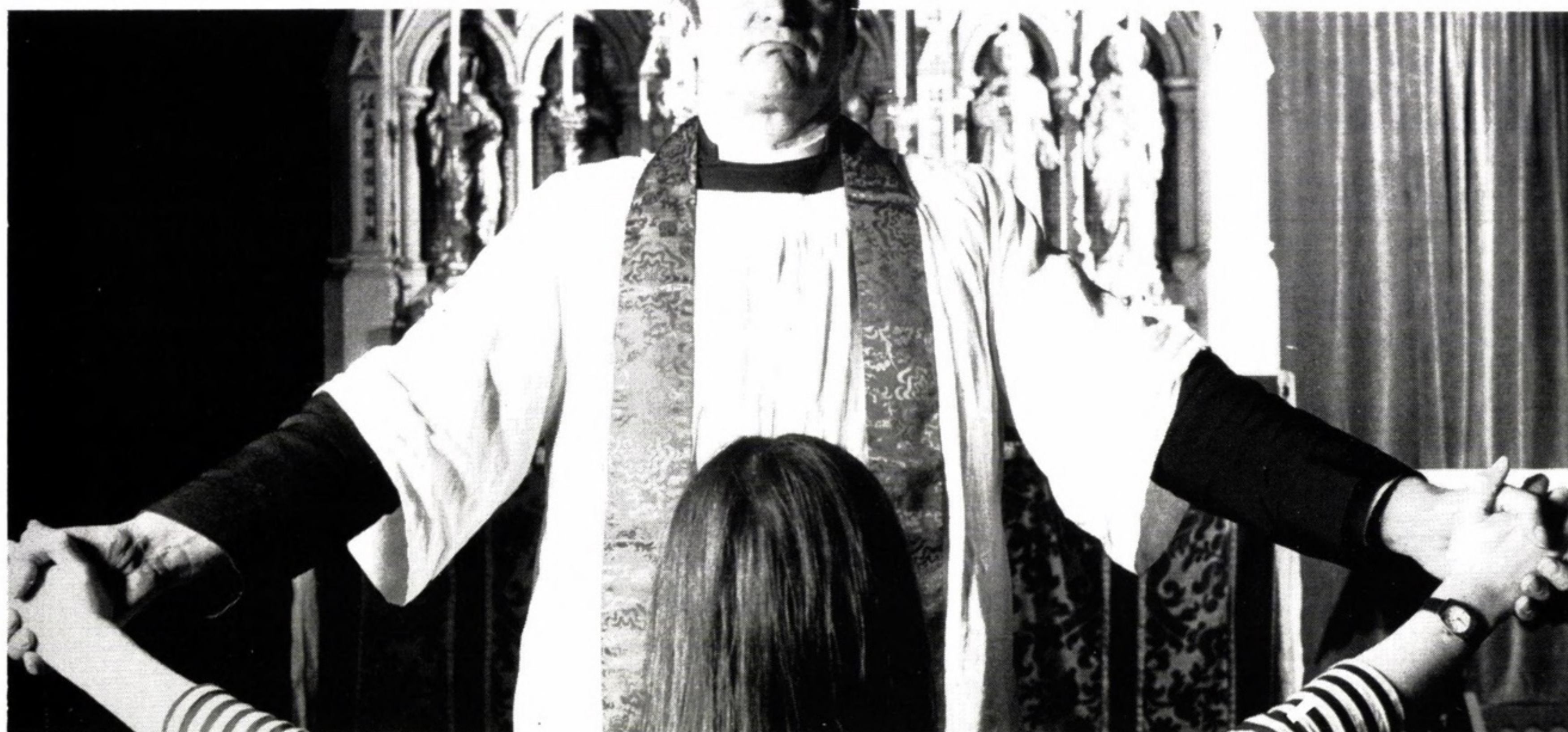
Incombustibility

Definition: Physical immunity to burning.

- Firewalking is common in Third World religious festivals.



- New Zealand magistrate Colonel Gudgeon went with friends in 1899 to watch a Maori fire walk and was invited to join in. The Maori 'mana' or spiritual protection was handed over to him and his friends and they walked on red-hot coals feeling no more than a tingle.
- Under hypnosis a subject's skin will blister if they are touched with a pencil they are told is red-hot metal and will remain unscathed if touched by red-hot metal they are told is a pencil.



COLIN DAVEY / CAMERA PRESS

'In Jesus' name, leave her.' A formal exorcism in an Anglican church.

Satanic verses

*No-one can be a Catholic saint without having shown their paranormal power by performing a miracle. Yet the Christian view is usually that the paranormal is too dangerous an area to mess with. Here Australian writer **James Danson** recalls taking part in an exorcism.*

IT was in my mid-twenties that I came face to face with destruction personified. I'd been a Christian for half a dozen years, and had come to see how God's concern for the oppressed and hatred of injustice were the substances for which my own embryonic concerns were vague shadows. I was able to accept that 'miracles' had happened 2,000 years ago in a dry and dusty Palestine, but about almost anything else paranormal I remained a sceptic.

At the end of each year summer camps, concerts and youth activities are run by Christians all along the Australian coast. There's nothing strange in that; most Aussies are skilled at avoiding them! But one year, for some reason, my team of unsuspecting Christians was visited by a group of renegades, who called themselves 'Satanists'. As the days and nights unfolded, they informed us that their aim was to ruin us (or, in their more flamboyant moments, to destroy us). This would have been quite laughable if it had not been for their very tangible presence.

Initially their behaviour, though erratic,

was 'normal' enough. They spread rumours among both the team and visitors about corruption and immorality. They peddled hard drugs. In the quieter moments of concerts they would stand and shout abuse, obscenities and curses. Their language was not just foul, but vehement and poisonous. Yet all this was of little more than nuisance value. It was only when we started to talk with them away from the crowd that an altogether different picture emerged.

Only a few of the Christian team had encountered Satanists before. Most of us, when we first heard, merely raised an eyebrow and said 'Oh'. The team had encountered pimps, beggars, street-fighters and many highly disturbed individuals, so why should we be unable to deal with Satanists?

There were three angry Satanists, five tired Christians, none of whom had any experience with this level of 'paranormal' activity. The encounter began with a heated argument about some moral issue. Violence ebbed, as did tempers and frustration for all of us. The argument never became more rational. Despite the weariness of our bodies, we decided to sit it out

— and did so for three nights.

For whatever reason each of our antagonists' faces looked tired, dark-eyed and harrowed. They were the embodiment of discontent, moving spasmodically in large twitches. There was torment in these people's lives. There was no doubting they were angry. There was no doubting they felt trapped. But not by us Christians. In many ways we provided plenty of scope for them to leave; they *chose* to stay. They felt compelled, in their own words, to serve Satan.

Then there were the voices. Two of the three, in the course of the evenings we spent together, spoke in multiple voices, each representing a different 'persona'. This, I know, can also be evidence of psychological distress. Yet each of the voices used by an individual were uncannily different, not just in intonation and volume, but in grammar, choice of words and levels of anger and bitterness. There seemed to be different 'persons' within each person. Often they fought violently with each other for supremacy, or merely the right to talk. Each of them had names; each of them spat

venom; each of them knew who Jesus was but fought energetically when it was said that he loved them.

The nature of these personal battles was often tragic. But two things characterized our adversaries: first, their difficulty in accepting they were free agents; second, their urge to destroy.

The 'voices' seemed to know our weaknesses intimately, and sought to unsettle us at every opportunity. Surprisingly, and without any forward planning, these attacks were handled, each in turn, with relative calmness – and an acceptance of whatever truth there was in each of the charges made. But we knew we were not on trial, and felt confident that the struggles we were seeing were being carried out on another plane. This was not our battle, to be won or lost by our expertise or clever rhetoric. It was more that we were guides, sounding boards.

'We'll kill the lot of you. (Another voice) I hate your guts. I'll smash you to a pulp. You're all lousy idiots, and you're not going to get out of here. (Another voice) I hate you, you're all bloody hypocrites.' Then, in mock worship, 'Jesus, Jesus, lovely lovely Jesus'.

Many of their expletives were genital-based. Wherever there was a pause in our conversation, they turned it into a crack or crevice full of bitterness, doubt or chaotic outbursts and frenzy.

After the marathon hours, the Christians were tired. But two of the three Satanists showed signs of buoyancy. There was no head-spinning or floods of lime green vomit as there was in *The Exorcist*.

'You're lying!', 'Holy shit, you're crazy!', 'The spirit lies, the spirit lies', and 'You're dead, you're all dead, you're dead...' Another lunge forward, some repeated spitting.

Eventually, when the two were at a peak of animation, with flailing arms and flailing tongues, they finally seized on the liberation offered them by the simple words, 'choose God', 'resist Satan', and the words of exorcism: 'In Jesus' name, leave them'.

We couldn't quite tell what was happening. We weren't using Jesus' name as a mantra, nor as a talisman. We said it because, quite simply, we meant it. We knew this was the way of performing exorcisms in the Bible; there seemed to be nothing else to say. But our hearers – or more precisely, their 'guests' – were wreathed in discomfort at Jesus' name. Wreathed, too, in resistance for minute after intense minute, until something snapped, and in a roar that would freeze a tropical sunset, the resident spirits fled.

At the end of these traumatic days and nights, the two made a complete turnaround: they chose to give up their

association with Satanism and to follow Jesus instead. After our final night of struggling they became – without exaggeration – joyful; in their own words surprisingly 'free'. Their bodies, too, enjoyed a considerable change, and they even began walking with more of a spring in their step.

The third member struggled on, the embodiment of hatred and bitterness. We somehow slipped from being the target of his gall, his energies becoming focused on his recent peers instead. The abuse he gave to his former colleagues was depressing and often vile, but they pressed on regardless.

Sceptics will smile. They will say this was nothing other than a case of severely

disturbed people coming to terms with some trauma. I can only say that through my father's work as a psychiatric nurse, I had seen many deeply disturbed people. Some claimed to be Christ or President Kennedy, but none of them showed the specific focus of these Satanists, nor their tireless desire to destroy.

I'm a down-to-earth Christian with liberal views and Satanic possession doesn't fit at all easily into my scheme of things. But I have no other explanation for what I experienced that summer on the coast: what I took part in was an exorcism. ■

James Danson is a freelance writer based in New South Wales.

The truth about voodoo

The most feared of all religions is simply misunderstood, argues **Leslie Griffiths**.

IT goes without saying that the novels of Dennis Wheatley are far more potent than the anthropological researches of Melville Herskovitz in shaping public opinion of Haitian voodoo. Ever since the lurid descriptions of Haitian beliefs as 'brutalizing' and 'barbarous' by Spencer St John (British consul to Haiti in the 1860s), voodoo has been synonymous in the Western mind with black magic and cannibalism.

Of course there is no smoke without fire and a satanic version of voodoo is undoubtedly practised in various localities across the land. I have myself come across zombies, or living dead, who have been given potions that have induced a kind of brain death. When the voodoo priest, the *houngan*, applies the antidote there is only a partial recovery and the resultant shambling wrecks are most pitiable to behold. But it would be as fair for me to suggest that stories of satanic and ritual sexual abuse of children is typical of British contemporary Christianity as it would to indicate that imprecatory and malign rituals are a fair picture of voodoo.

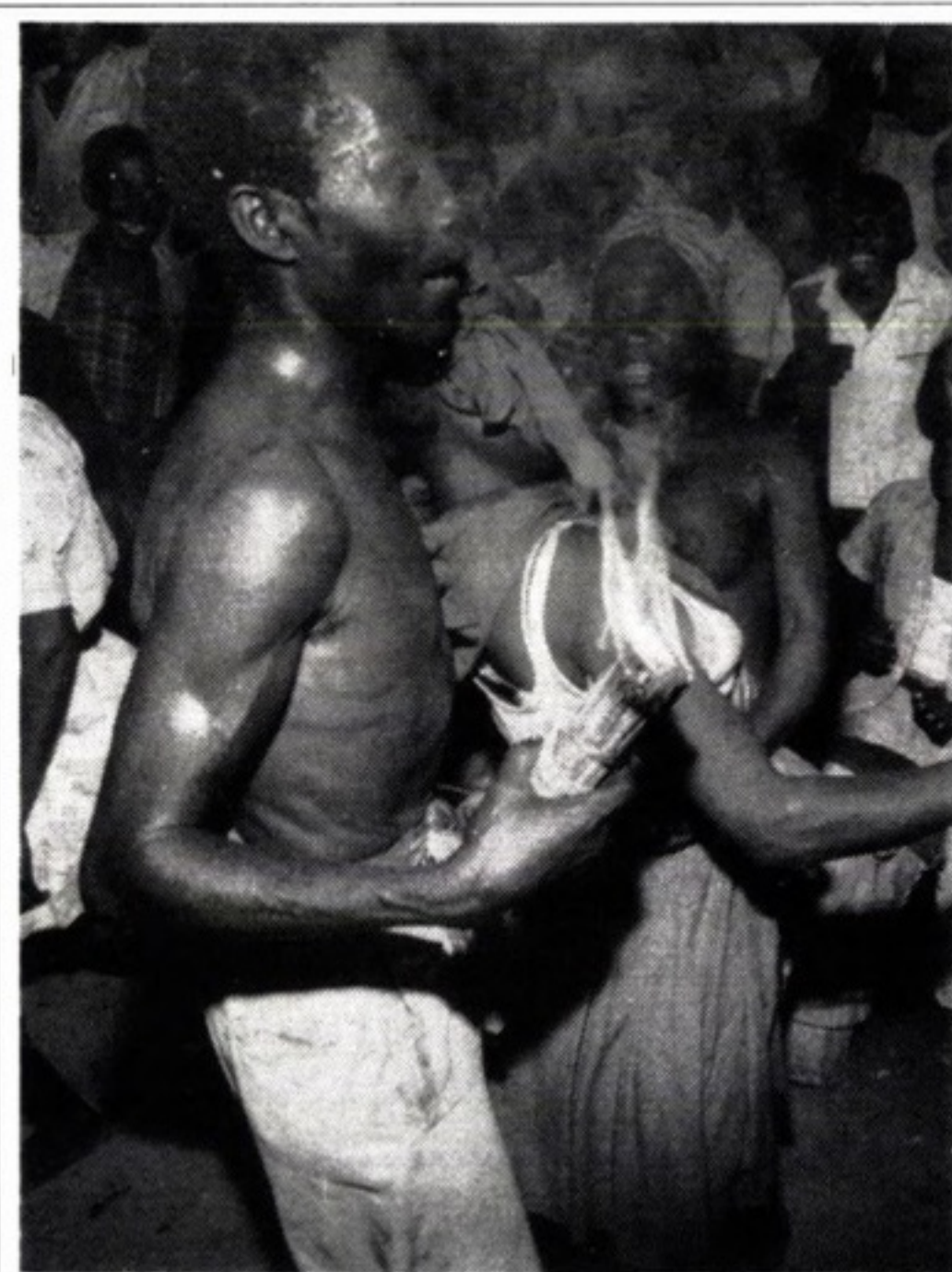
The voodoo religion is in fact almost entirely benign. It emerged from a variety of animistic belief systems that came over from Africa with the slaves and which have since been overlaid with Roman Catholic hagiography and ritual: Catholic religious objects are routinely found on voodoo altars alongside a skull or a bottled snake.

Voodoo belongs to the everyday world of all Haitian people. There are certainly some who deplore its prevalence and try to destroy it (usually US-led right-wing Protestants) but nobody denies its existence or pretends it's not there. It has the main elements of any religion and it gives Haitian people a sense of identity. They seek the mediation of the spirits in their communications with *Granmèt-la* (God, the Great Master). It is fatalistic, offering coping mechanisms rather than a revolutionary or

transformatory vision. But its music, its picturesque language and its dynamic inspiration of successive generations of artists reveals a religion that gives expression to the deepest levels of Haitian self-awareness and culture.

There is no question that the dictator Papa Doc Duvalier used voodoo as one of the three pillars of his power, which helped to brutalize the nation into subjection during his 14-year rule. His speeches were redolent with allusions to the voodoo mind and spirit; he dressed so as to look a little like the dreaded Baron Samedi, the harbinger of death. But this cunning co-option of the popular faith should not be held against the voodoo religion itself – any more than the fantasies of Dennis Wheatley should be allowed to define a whole nation's faith.

Leslie Griffiths is an Anglican priest and broadcaster long acquainted with Haiti and its culture.



GUIDO MANGOLD / CAMERA PRESS

Gazing into the Sun

I CAN hardly believe I'm doing this. The phone rings again and I say: 'Hello, Sun Hotline here'. Only British readers, I'm afraid, will be able to appreciate how bizarre this feels. *The Sun* is the UK's biggest-selling newspaper, a right-wing tabloid owned by Rupert Murdoch which has successfully dragged the rest of the press downmarket towards its package of female nudity, celebrity gossip and knee-jerk philosophy. If there is a single publication that British readers would consider to be the antithesis of the *NI* then *The Sun* is very probably it.

Yet here I am, sitting in its fortress in London's Docklands, scene of an historic pitched battle against trade unionism (which Murdoch won hands down).

Why am I here? Because *The Sun* is engaging in a 'psychic experiment'. Its readers have been asked to stare into the photographed eyes of US medium Diana Gazes at midday, hold a spoon or fork between two fingers and try to bend it just by mental concentration. Diana is locked in a room behind me, deep in meditation and trying to project psychic energy all over the country.

On the dot of twelve I try the experiment for myself – I am at least closer than anyone else in the country to the energy source so that might overcome my own apparent lack of psychic talent. Nothing happens but it's true that the situation is hardly conducive to concen-

tration – I'm sitting in a huge open-plan office in which hard-bitten *Sun* sports and features writers are going about their business and wondering what on earth this weirdo is doing with a fork stuck in the air.

I then move over to take charge of one of four phones dedicated to the Psychic Experiment. And there I stay for the next four hours. The phones are continually busy – I put down one call and immediately have to pick up another.

Now such is my distrust of *The Sun* that I would not believe anything which appeared in it unless it was confirmed by about six other sources. So I can quite understand that I have more or less invited cynical disbelief by getting mixed up in such an adventure. In Britain at least you put *The Sun* together with the paranormal and the result is to multiply the incredibility factor almost infinitely.

But stop a minute. Here I, and not some *Sun* sub-editor seeking a soaraway sensationalist story, was the first port-of-call – I was able to gauge the honesty of the responders by asking them as many questions as I wanted. There were a few who simply phoned to say that nothing had happened. And there were a couple who were clearly just having a lark. But the vast majority were from ordinary people with no previous experience of anything psychic who had been shocked to find that their spoons or forks had bent without their having applied any physical pressure. Their sheer amazement resounded down the phone line.

After the first few calls, bent spoons and forks became routine, as if we'd entered a kind of parallel universe where such events were entirely normal. I started to look out for stories with something different about them. There was the DJ on Radio Northampton who'd been making a joke out of the experiment, telling his listeners to focus on the studio's broken-down air-conditioning system, which

engineers had been unable to fix. At 12.02 the air-conditioning inexplicably started working again. Then there was the man who tried to start a watch that hadn't worked for 10 years: he gave up trying in disgust and went out to walk his dog, only to find the watch had started up again by the time he got back.

These could be explained away as coincidence so that they are actually less impressive than the 'routine' stories of spoon-bending like that of 20-year-old secretary Trudy, who came across the story in her paper just before midday. 'I just thought I'd give it a go,' she said. 'I felt a tingling sensation in my finger and thumb where I was holding the fork and then it started to bend.'

Then there were the people who felt physical ailments disappear. One of the most remarkable was Elizabeth, who was born with her lumber bone pressing onto her spine, leaving her with constant back pain. Throughout her 61-year life she has had to take painkilling tablets. 'When I was 40 the doctor said I could have an operation but if I did there was a danger I wouldn't walk again. So I just carried on taking the tablets. When I saw about this woman in *The Sun* I thought there was no harm in trying. I just sort of relaxed myself and looked at her. To my amazement I felt a tingling through my body and when I stood up, for the first time in my life the pain was gone.' A month later when I phoned her the pain had still not returned.

What should we make of this? Diana Gazes believes that it was her calling down of help from 'higher, astral planes' which made this kind of thing possible, though she stresses that she was only putting people in touch with a psychic power which is latent in all of us. You may well be left cold by the crass framing of the story in *The Sun* and by Diana Gazes' association with 'psychic TV' – which has become quite a big thing on cable in the US, with a similar feel for the unconverted as those dismal fundamentalist TV programmes.

But it does seem to me that something was going on here. One month on I phoned up some of the callers I'd spoken to – at this distance even I began to wonder whether they'd been sincere. But they seemed just as they had originally – totally straight, ordinary people who'd been shocked to experience something remarkable. Maybe their experience had nothing to do with Diana Gazes and they only needed a prompt to concentrate their own power of psychokinesis (mind over matter). As experiments go, this is as far from being scientific as you could get. But I still find it pretty persuasive.



ILLUSTRATION / JIM NEEDLE

Radical mediumship

Nina Silver explains how she started talking to particles of light – and offers a feminist analysis of our relationship with the spirit world.

HAVE you ever been awakened by your own voice reassuring you about the next day's ordeals – where you hear the words, know your lips are moving, yet at the same time feel strongly that it is not you speaking?

Today, we understand this phenomenon as trance mediumship or channeling. But in 1979, I had to try and explain this you/not-you dichotomy. A psychology graduate, I divided the two-way conversation into the personae of the 'child' and the comforting 'adult' – an idea derived from 'transactional analysis'. But the tremendous amount of love I received from the 'adult' was unlike anything I'd ever felt before. With no frame of reference for such energy, I reluctantly called the inspired message a 'religious experience' – even though I didn't believe in God – because that came closest to describing the phenomenon.

One week later, on the threshold of sleep, my mouth again started moving. Trembling, I turned on my cassette recorder and my career as a professional trance medium began.

At first, speaking to spirits was frightening. After all, someone invisible is borrowing your vocal cords – in effect doing physical therapy on you from the inside – and it took time for me to feel comfortable with being out of control. But I always got myself back, never having 'lost' myself to begin with. Channeling meant sharing, rather than abdicating, my space, and I enjoyed the company. Besides, the communion of channeling felt familiar, like the experiences of precognition and telepathy I'd routinely had throughout my life.

Communing with humans proved infinitely harder. During a routine conversation when the inevitable 'And what do you do for a living?' came up, I told the truth, and people otherwise comfortable



with paranormal matters retreated when I mentioned mediumship. Talking to spirits was considered dangerous and unevolved, and the fear surrounding spirit communication often escalated into hysteria. Assuming the worst about my line of work, they envisioned voodoo and black magic.

When finally, to my relief, I found people who would talk to me about it, I encountered another roadblock. The acceptance of spirits didn't provide insurance against misinformation. Well-meaning friends cautioned me not to give the spirits too much rein lest they 'possess' me. Others smugly advised that eventually I'd be able to do readings on my own without depending on an altered state which, they implied, was really me anyway. Long-time psychics declared they had no need to

channel low-level astral beings, as they received information straight from Big Daddy himself. Healers insisted that they dispensed loving cosmic frequencies, not the cheap and paltry energy of disembodied entities. And still other mediums were suspicious of my approach. They would channel only after drawing the shades, chanting 'Kumbayah' and praying to God for protection.

I never conducted such rites, eschewing them as formalities. Nor did I require much time to 'tune in' to the proper vibrations because for me the connection was always present. It was not a matter of turning on the radio as much as increasing the volume and selecting the desired channel. My methodology, according to many channelers, contained too much science



ILLUSTRATION / JACKIE MORRIS

and not enough religion.

Most channelers claimed that their guides, when in body, had been celebrated doctors, scholars or writers. This smacked of 'my guide is better than yours' – in other words 'male' and 'with a higher score in the psychic book of records'. As soon as I became skilled enough to mentally (clairaudiently) receive input from my guide, the first thing I asked was, 'Who the hell are you?' I hoped it wouldn't be a Native American medicine man or Egyptian king. I had encountered enough of those, and didn't want to be part of another male-dominated trend conferring importance by association.

'I am a particle of gold light,' came the astounding, quantum physics-sounding reply. This is certainly different, I thought. 'Many people need to regard us as human in order to feel less afraid, but I assure you that I am an astral particle who also possesses a wave form.' My golden buddy decided to take the name of Ia because – and I would hear this being explained to others many times during readings 'when I speak, you must perceive me through Nina. Because we are so harmonious in personality and values, I feel I am very much a part of her. So I took the vowels in her name.' Obviously, a particle of light has no sex, but to make life simpler we agreed on the mutually preferred pronoun 'she'. This delighted me. I was

tired of all those 'hes' channeling through mediums and felt that an intelligent and vocal 'she' would help rebalance the patriarchal scales.

My feminist outlook on the world – and the fact that my particle friend was an equally committed feminist! – elicited some raised eyebrows among my colleagues. But soon after, it was my turn to raise my eyebrows. I began tackling the metaphysical literature and discovered that even those philosophies which affirmed the existence of spirits nevertheless catalogued the world according to hierarchy: novice or knowledgeable, lowly or evolved, worthless or worthy. This included the structure of the spiritual realms. Any spiritual ideology, after all, could only mirror the patriarchal system that produced it.

Any system that explains our relationship to the cosmos in hierarchical terms will question one that does not. It will likewise condemn whoever communes with the life force without the sanction of churches and other establishment institutions. Since I abhorred doctrine and said so, I was perceived by other psychics and mediums as a bad girl, disrespectful of the mystical realms. I was supposed to acknowledge how much more significant spiritual matters were than mundane human affairs and how much more saintly spirits were than people – at least the evolved spirits, usually 'hes' and often

called angels. Instead, disliking barriers, I had dubbed my astral companions 'pols' (plural for the acronym 'particle of light'), and called them by their first names, generally ignoring titles of royalty, scholarship or yogihood.

If my human associates disapproved, my pol pals didn't mind. They told jokes and played word games with me to lighten up discussions about existential loneliness and humanity's fear of loving. Ia became a beloved friend and an integral part of my life – although of course she functioned differently from a human. Having neither a discernible physical body nor worries about keeping it fed and safe from muggers, Ia could effortlessly express her love and joy. Most people found her energy healing.

Ia could also be downright raunchy at times. I had initially thought her earthiness and so-close-to-being-human humanity would be welcomed, since it offered an alternative to those ancient dry teachings, but the mixed reactions of my clients proved otherwise. It seemed many people were not looking for an understanding ally as much as an authority figure. They voiced their preferences for yogis and 'name' archangels, religion-certified masters who would tell them in lofty language what to do. The desire for absolution was strong.

Eventually it became clear to me that the psychic and the spiritual were not the



same. 'Everything, including spirituality, is a product of its culture,' was what all but the most rigid and patriarchal spirit guides said to me; and I heartily agreed. Accepting the premise that astral beings have been mortal, it's unrealistic to assume that they suddenly become omniscient – or more open-minded – once they change form. Be wary, I told my clients, if a channeled message claims to deliver Truth from God's very mouth: this smacked suspiciously of patriarchal elitism to me 'Astral' didn't mean 'accurate', 'better', or 'spiritual' just because the message was flowery or the delivery fancy.

It also made sense that just as people attract each other to fulfil their needs, a particle of light is drawn to a human who has compatible qualities – and vice versa. An egotistical medium might relate to an equally self-serving particle; a puritanical medium to a spirit with a repressive morality.

What a blessing Ia felt as I did. At the beginning of our relationship, I'd lapsed into the patriarchal point system myself, inducing Ia to lecture me numerous times that she was not Goddess or God. I soon realized that a feminist approach to enlightenment was crucial. Spirituality steeped in male supremacist values was not spirituality at all, but a form of mass control. It disenfranchised people by subordinating them to a supposedly greater force rather than

empowering them with a sense of their own wholeness and ability to connect to the Life Force themselves. I despaired of ever finding an already existing spiritual philosophy I could salute.

Then I discovered Paganism, the Old Religion of Europe. The season's cycles were celebrated; the Earth honored instead of exploited; and humans, as part of Nature, celebrated themselves through the enjoyment and pleasure of sex. I could relate to this.

As a sworn atheist, I couldn't relate to the Goddess and her consort Gods as actual figures the way some people did, although I recognized the attempt at balance that was being made through the worship of both male and female deities. I instead saw the deities as symbols to help one tune in to Self, Others, Nature and Cosmos. Pagans were of the heath, the hearth – the organic center of one's life which a punitive, moralistic church could never be. Pagans embraced matriarchal values that other traditions ignored, trivialized or pretended had never existed in the Earth's history. Because the credo 'Do as you will, but harm none' encouraged people to perceive their own divinity, Paganism never became a hierarchical institution. It allowed for change and growth in a world that is never static.

Accepting the body's natural cycles of sex, birth and death leads us to communing

with the non-material or spiritual world. The more life-affirming the spiritual tradition – as Native cultures tend to be – the more ordinary its proponents regard astral-physical plane communication, whatever its form. When Christianity dominated Europe, consigning to sin and eternal damnation those who asserted their own connection to the spiritual source, this notion of 'sin' was reinforced by putting the Pagans and Celts to death. Once people became separated from their own source of strength and were forced to rely on something external to do their thinking and feeling for them, terror at being 'possessed' by uncontrollable forces became rampant. Thus was mediumship, part of the old Pagan tradition, vilified.

Neo-paganism, an Earth-centered, feminist consciousness, recognizes not only the interconnectedness and sanctity of all life, but the importance of a non-hierarchical way of dealing with relationships. People concerned about transforming the prevalent dominant/submissive pathology of our culture must understand that our perceptions of the psychic realms must ultimately be transformed as well. It does little good to rediscover or invent a new paradigm of spirituality if we still harbor a fear of Other – which includes spirits – taught us long ago by patriarchy.

The fear of mediumship that possesses many people today conveniently upholds the church and other establishment institutions which claim a monopoly on answers to the secrets of life. This fear of communion with non-human sources is insidious, whether it comes from fundamentalist Christians or New Agers. 'Non-human' includes animals, minerals, plants, quantum energies. How can we as a species survive if we insist on remaining exclusive, so disconnected to Life?

The most valuable guidance you can receive from a spiritual source is to trust your own centre. In her readings, Ia always emphasizes the belief in self:

'I experience the universe as a loving force. Beauty and transcendental ways of being are integral parts of both the cosmos and ourselves. There are many levels of existence, I being one speck of sand in a billion deserts – and I am sure there are more I cannot perceive.'

'The line between self and other should be remembered – not so we feel isolated, but to understand that even as we each are part of a larger, loving force, we are also unique individuals in whatever stage of evolution, consciousness or form.'

'Follow your heart. There are as many paths to truth as there are beings to create and follow these paths.'

Nina Silver is a therapist, singer, composer and writer. She is currently working on a book of essays called *The Visionary Feminist*.



ILLUSTRATION / JIM NEEDLE

Journey's end

Chris Brazier tries to make sense of the senseless – and has a strange experience along the way.

I FOUND Nina Silver's *Radical Mediumship* article a breath of fresh air after my other encounters with mediums. Here was someone who claimed to talk to spirits but who didn't claim to have a hotline to God. She was also clearly on the same political wavelength as the NI.

I was intrigued enough by what she said to seek further contact with her. She has, she told me, a pretty good success rate with hitherto non-psychic people 'breaking through' to channel for spirits themselves. Open mind at the ready, I simply had to give this a go. At the very least, I thought, this should be a novel enough conclusion to my personal journey through paranormal territory – even if it ends up in anti-climax.

So I met Nina in an apartment on the

Upper East Side of New York City ready for anything. The session started with a mixture of therapy and laying on of hands – she held her hands above my *chakras* (the Hindu system of seven energy points around the body) while we talked about any fears or blockages I might have that might stop me channeling for myself. There were frankly quite a few. The most sceptical and hard-headedly rational of people might well admit to a smidgen of worry about the idea of allowing a spirit to enter their own body.

Eventually Nina started to channel for Ia, the 'point of light' or spirit she describes in her article: she went into a light trance and started speaking fluently in another tone of voice. [In what follows I will just

describe what happened, and refer to the spirits as people, without using quote marks or qualifications like 'Nina claimed that...' We'll try and disentangle it all afterwards.]

After a while I asked Ia if there were any entities attached to me in the same way as she was attached to Nina. She said there were two: 'Henry' and 'Marie', and eventually she made way for them.

Nina shifted uncomfortably in her chair as Henry arrived inside her. He didn't find it very comfortable either: his first words were 'It feels like a musty closet in here but it'll do'. He spoke in gruff tones and had a pretty abrasive manner: when I said nothing, not sure of the etiquette involved in talking to spirits directly, he exploded 'don't I even get a hello?!' I ventured a meek 'hello' and

asked why he was specially interested in me. 'Good question! No accounting for taste, is there?!' Charming. For all that, Henry said that he'd been fond of me (or my spirit) throughout many centuries.

It gets weirder. When Marie came through she was infinitely gentler in tone. She started: 'I don't suppose I can expect you to know this but we have had a very long and quite loving relationship'. She said we had been incarnated together many times, almost always as brother and sister. Once, she said, she was the brother and I the sister, but she felt more comfortable with female incarnations. The last time we were incarnated together was in sixteenth-century Germany when my family took her in as an orphan. But we remain close even when we are not 'in body' and since I was born this time around she has stayed close to my 'energy field'. She said she was very pleased to get in touch and would like to try to contact me directly.

So now we'd reached the point of the whole session, where I was supposed to try and become a medium myself. How did I feel at this point? Well, intrigued mainly. I didn't really expect anything to happen but on the other hand I've always rather rued the fact that I don't have a sister, so the idea of a long-lost soul sister with whom I've shared many lifetimes was rather appealing.

I closed my eyes and tried to relax. Marie said she was about to leave Nina's field and that I should 'keep a look-out' for her. And this is the strange part. All of a sudden I started to feel the most overwhelming sensation coming down through my head and reaching down to the level of my stomach. The sensation is difficult to describe but it was like I was being bombarded with light and colour. I've since described it to friends as being like an orgasm taking place in the top half of the body but that's only because I can think of no other sensation strong enough to sweep rational thought away. Really all I can say is that it was a sensation unlike any other that I have ever experienced.

Shell-shocked

After 10 seconds or so this surge of energy eased off to a level where I started to wonder if I was still experiencing anything or not. The idea now was that Marie was to try and talk using my vocal cords. This got nowhere. I opened my mouth to see if anything would happen and started looking around inside my mind for any 'thoughts' that didn't seem like mine. But anything from now on could have been my own imagination. And to be honest all I wanted to do was clear out and try to make some sense of what had happened.

I wandered back along Broadway rather shell-shocked. Okay, I'd gone into this with an open mind. But after all the other

dismal visits to mediums I hadn't really expected anything out of the ordinary to happen. That surge of energy, though, was real – I felt it as surely as I feel this computer keyboard right now. The only rational explanation I could come up with was that I might have induced the sensation myself by a form of self-suggestion after three hours in an intense situation: it's well known that people can emerge from a therapy session quite 'high'.

I made up my mind to go back to see Nina the next day with a different hat on, as a tough-minded journalist rather than as someone prepared to give anything a go once. If Marie has always been looking out for me, I reasoned, she surely ought to know the names of my children and what my front room at home looks like.

This test didn't work out. Marie told me the next day that spirits are unable to experience physical reality unless they have been invited into a body to see through its eyes. All she could do was to pick up the changes in my 'vibrations', getting some sense of when I was feeling elated or crushed by something.

I was in an entirely different mood, my scepticism aroused as if in reaction to giving so much play to the spirit hypothesis the day before. And I certainly wasn't planning to try channeling again. But before I left to catch my plane Nina persuaded me to give it another go to see if it clarified anything. And, remarkably, the same thing happened again. At the point where Marie was supposed to be 'entering' me I had the same overwhelming and uncanny sensation – and if anything this time it was stronger. Again, after the initial burst any effects became questionable and inconclusive but in trying to explain the 'surge' I didn't have the 'intensity of therapy' argument to fall back on any more.

Seeking in desperation for some way of testing this experience against 'reality' I asked Marie to give me an undertaking that she would be there ready to talk to me next time I went to consult a genuine trance medium. She said she'd do her best though sometimes you got pushed out of the way; she said she'd always be there if I tried to get in touch with her and asked me to practise channeling on my own.

Back in England I tried a few times but never experienced anything like I had in New York. I visited two more trance mediums of high repute. I gave them no clues but simply said that I'd been in touch with two spirits who were closely attached to me and that

I wanted to talk to them again.

There was no trace of Marie. In both cases I ended up having a chat to one of the medium's regulars: in the first a Chinese sage offered me some pretty sound advice deriving from Buddhism or Taoism; in the second I had a long chat with – wait for it – Winston Churchill. The bigger the name that comes through from the spirit world, the more sceptical I inevitably become. But since I mention him you might be interested to know that 'Churchill' is now gravely concerned about the environment and wishes that the world's leaders attempting to deal with the problem had more 'backbone'.

Disentangling

So what do I make of all this? I've met fraudulent mediums and I don't believe that Nina Silver is one of them. I feel she genuinely believes what she has told me: I trust her. Which leaves only two possibilities: that what she says is true, and somewhere out on another plane I do have a long-lost soul sister; or that all of these alternative personalities she conjures up are simply emerging from a deeper part of herself.

I'm quite persuaded by this 'super-ESP' explanation of spirit communication. It would explain why I've never got the same information from a medium twice. It would also explain why the kind of spirits that attach themselves to mediums tend to reflect their own personality and values, as Nina points out in her own article. Thus Nina gets a comradely, feminist particle of light while a traditional spiritual seeker gets the Angel Gabriel.

This theory is supported by two independent experiments conducted into the mysterious communication that can emerge when people sit round a table for an



ILLUSTRATION / JIM NEEDLE



Creating a ghost. The 'Philip' Group of Toronto, whose experiment suggested that 'spirits' are aspects of our own minds.

informal séance. In the first a researcher in Dublin shuffled alphabet cards into a strange order and then placed them out of view of the people round the table. Messages were still spelled out by a glass sliding around the table, which ruled out any possibility of cheating. In the second, much more recent experiment, a group of people in Toronto decided to make up a fictional spirit entity called 'Philip', creating a detailed biography for him. And after a while this 'Philip' started communicating with them via 'table-raps' – giving yes/no answers that accorded with the biography they had given him.

This strongly suggests that the paranormal element at work here is a kind of pooled psychokinetic force which emerges from the participants' unconscious minds. But of course it does presuppose that you accept psychokinesis itself to be possible, which defies normal scientific logic.

After all the research I've done into this

issue I have emerged feeling convinced that humans do have some latent ability for ESP and psychokinesis. I've been persuaded partly by the sheer weight of the anecdotal testimony, but more by the experiments in parapsychology labs described on Page 15. On the evidence of their performance in laboratories, even humans with pronounced psychic ability simply see a bit more than the rest of us rather than the whole picture. But the lab results do seem to indicate that there is a 'psi' effect.

Of icebergs and genius

Even the most sceptical person would accept that the human mind is a hugely complex instrument which is like an iceberg – almost all of it is hidden and unfamiliar. In order to survive day by day we have to focus in very narrowly. When we're riding a bike it doesn't pay us to notice the myriad colours, sounds and textures that make up the natural world around us; we may well sacrifice our lives if we are not concentrating hard on the road ahead and the thundering truck beside.

But even the areas of the mind that we have uncovered take us way beyond this narrow 'normal' band of consciousness. Since Freud we have been aware of the vast unexplored territory of the unconscious. We also know that the human body is operated by the mind: all its routine functions are monitored and kept up to the mark by our autonomic nervous system. Both these aspects of the mind we conceive of as being somehow 'beneath' consciousness.

But we surely also have flashes of an aspect of the mind which is 'above' consciousness: flashes of inspiration or insight. At their most extreme, in the lives of people

we routinely categorize as 'supernormal' or having 'genius', these flashes become flares lighting up the path for all humanity. When Mozart heard whole symphonies in his mind and simply had to write them down he wasn't getting them from his conscious (which acted as dictation secretary) or from his unconscious in the negative, repressed sense of Freud. The same with the poetry of Coleridge – or of William Blake, who claimed no credit for his astonishing poetry himself, believing that he channeled it directly from 'the spirits'.

Who knows where these divine works of art actually came from? If we have trouble accepting Blake's own word for the spirit hypothesis, as with that of Nina Silver or any other medium, we have to come up with another explanation. And the only one I can think of at present is that there is some part of all our minds – more pronounced in some of us than in others – which is somehow able, as Jung believed, to key into a 'collective unconscious'.

One thing is clear: science can offer no explanation. Except, just possibly, where science itself becomes inspired and almost mystical. Einstein testified to moments when 'one feels free from identification with human limitation... At such moments one imagines that one stands on some spot of a small planet gazing in amazement at the cold and yet profoundly moving beauty of the eternal, the unfathomable. Life and death flow into one, and there is neither evolution nor destiny, only Being.' And Bell's theorem – that all objects and events in the cosmos are interconnected with each other – has led recent physicists to start speculating about an invisible field that holds all of reality together.

This seems a sight more 'paranormal' than some of the things this magazine has talked about. And it leaves us conveniently back where we started, amongst the discoveries of the new physics.

Having me as a guide on this magical mystery tour must have been of dubious value for you: as children of the twentieth-century West we all naturally insist on seeing things with our own eyes before we'll believe them. There's so much gullibility and woolly-mindedness at large in the fields of spiritualism and the New Age that this is a very healthy impulse.

Even I who experienced that strangest of sensations in New York am at a loss to come up with a satisfactory explanation for it. And even if I return now to the relative comfort of investigating the iniquities of the global economic system I may well take that mystery with me to the grave (or... ahem... beyond).

Something happened – I just don't know what. And I'm afraid that could serve as an adequate summary of human understanding of the paranormal. ■

Worth reading on... THE PARANORMAL

Richard Broughton's *Parapsychology: The Controversial Science* (Ballantine US, Rider UK) summarizes scientific research into the paranormal very clearly and entertainingly. The best introductions to the whole field of paranormal phenomena are Colin Wilson's *Beyond the Occult* (Grafton), a 20-years-on update of his bestseller *The Occult*; and Brian Inglis' *The Paranormal: An Encyclopedia of Psychic Phenomena*, which is unfortunately now out of print. Another book I strongly recommend is *Quantum Healing* by Deepak Chopra (Bantam), which argues very convincingly for a fundamental mind-body connection, drawing on Western medicine, Eastern meditational thought and on quantum physics. For an excellent lay introduction to quantum physics and relativity turn to Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (Rider).

HEALTH

Smoke screen of success

Vicious circle of tobacco

IN a year of acute drought, tobacco remains Zimbabwe's most important agricultural export: the Tobacco Marketing Board recently announced that tobacco sales have topped the one billion Zimbabwe dollar mark.

There seems little prospect of a slump in demand for tobacco despite the recession. In fact the glossy reports of the International Tobacco Growers' Association make much of the 1989 UN Food and Agriculture Organization's projection that demand will 'increase at an average rate of some two per cent through to the year 2000'.

Women are providing the new slack in the market. Faced with falling cigarette sales among adult men, who have for generations been its traditional market, the Western world's tobacco industry has been cleverly tailoring its advertising campaigns during the last few years to induce women to smoke, often through the pages of women's magazines.

Meanwhile the ploys of advertising companies have worked and in many countries of the European Community today, more teenage girls smoke than teenage boys, along with around 40 per cent of pregnant women.

Consequently increasing numbers of women are falling victim to smoking-related disease like heart attacks, strokes and lung cancer. In Scotland, for example, more women now die from lung cancer than from breast cancer.

There is now growing pressure on Health Ministers to ban advertising, particularly since recent reports from Canada, Norway and New Zealand reveal that cigarette consumption fell in those countries after advertising was prohibited.

Meanwhile in Zimbabwe, among daily drought-induced closures of sugar and cotton factories, tobacco is the only bright spot on the commercial scene. And here too, it casts a long shadow over the country's health.

In a statement for No Smoking Day recently, the Zimbabwe Medical Association (ZIMA) anticipated a 'rapid increase in mortality from smoking-related disease' not only in Zimbabwe, but in all Third World countries.

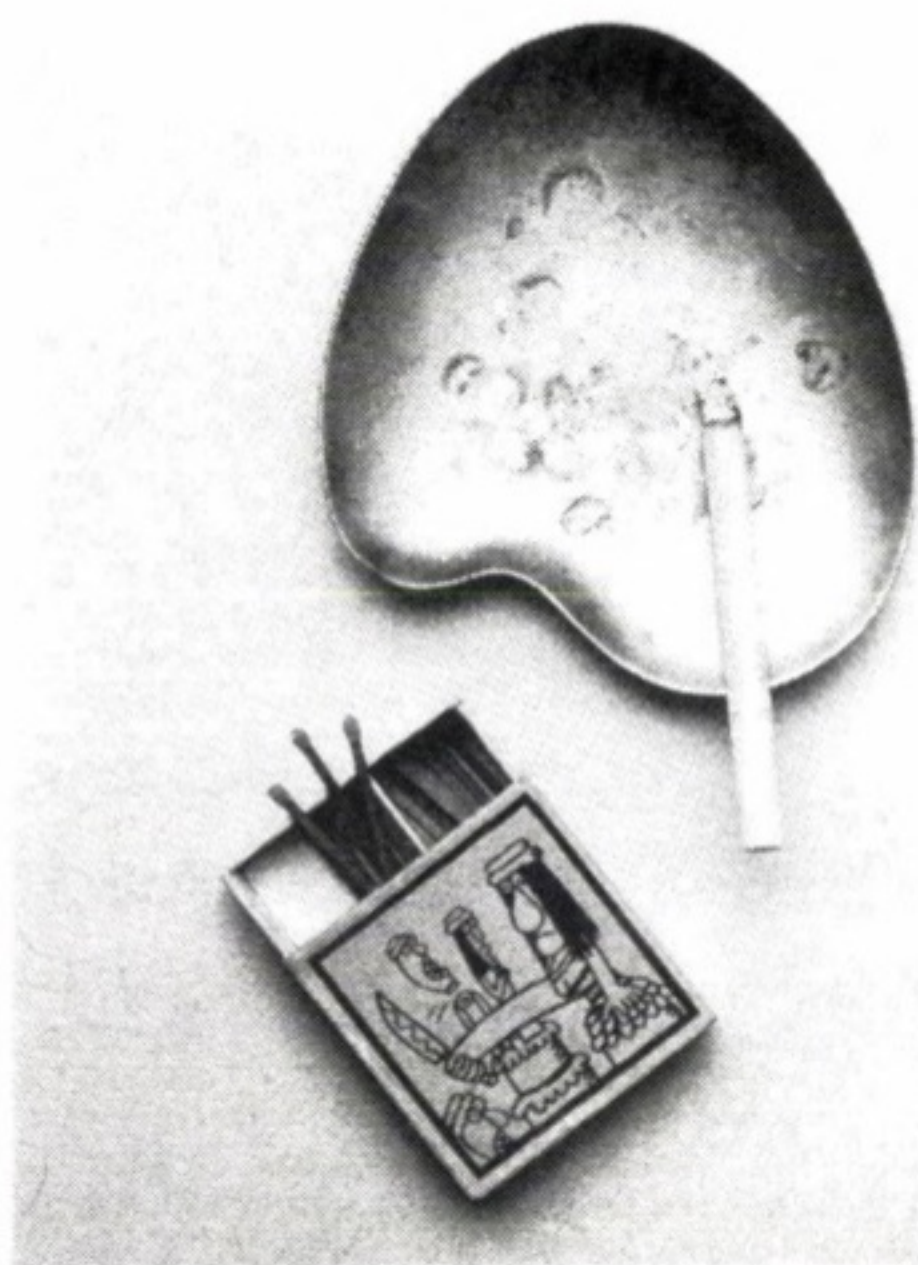
Many ordinary Zimbabweans are beginning to ask how, in this time of drought, tobacco-growing fits in with food production. Obviously the billion dollar exports help the Government pay its massive food import bill. But how much of the bill is due to tobacco growers cutting their maize hectareage?

The maize-tobacco equation is difficult because maize is more vulnerable to drought than tobacco. Nevertheless, even the President of

Zimbabwe's Tobacco Association, Michael Taggart, warned the annual general meeting that members must grow more food crops.

Despite the growing health lobby in Zimbabwe, it will be difficult to convince anyone to stop growing the 'loathsome weed' so long as it remains so profitable. ■

Sanjiva Wijesinha and Ronald Watts/Gemini



MARK EDWARDS / STILL PICTURES

Why kids run away

About 43,000 young people under 17 ran away from home over 100,000 times during 1990 in the UK, according to an informed estimate by the British National Children's Homes. True, only two per cent left their local area, most returned of their own accord, and a disproportionate number fled residential care. Nevertheless the trends are alarming and the question 'When can I leave home?' is the most common question the Children's Legal Centre is asked by young people. Listed below are the reasons why children in the UK run away:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Absence of love or adequate care
- Rows with parents
- To escape sanctions such as 'grounding' (being forbidden to go out)
- After parents split up
- Problems at school
- To avoid trouble (like a criminal charge)
- To live with someone else
- To go home or the home area (leaving residential care)
- A call for attention
- No job, no future, bored, fed up...

From Childright, No. 88, 1992

AUSTRALIA

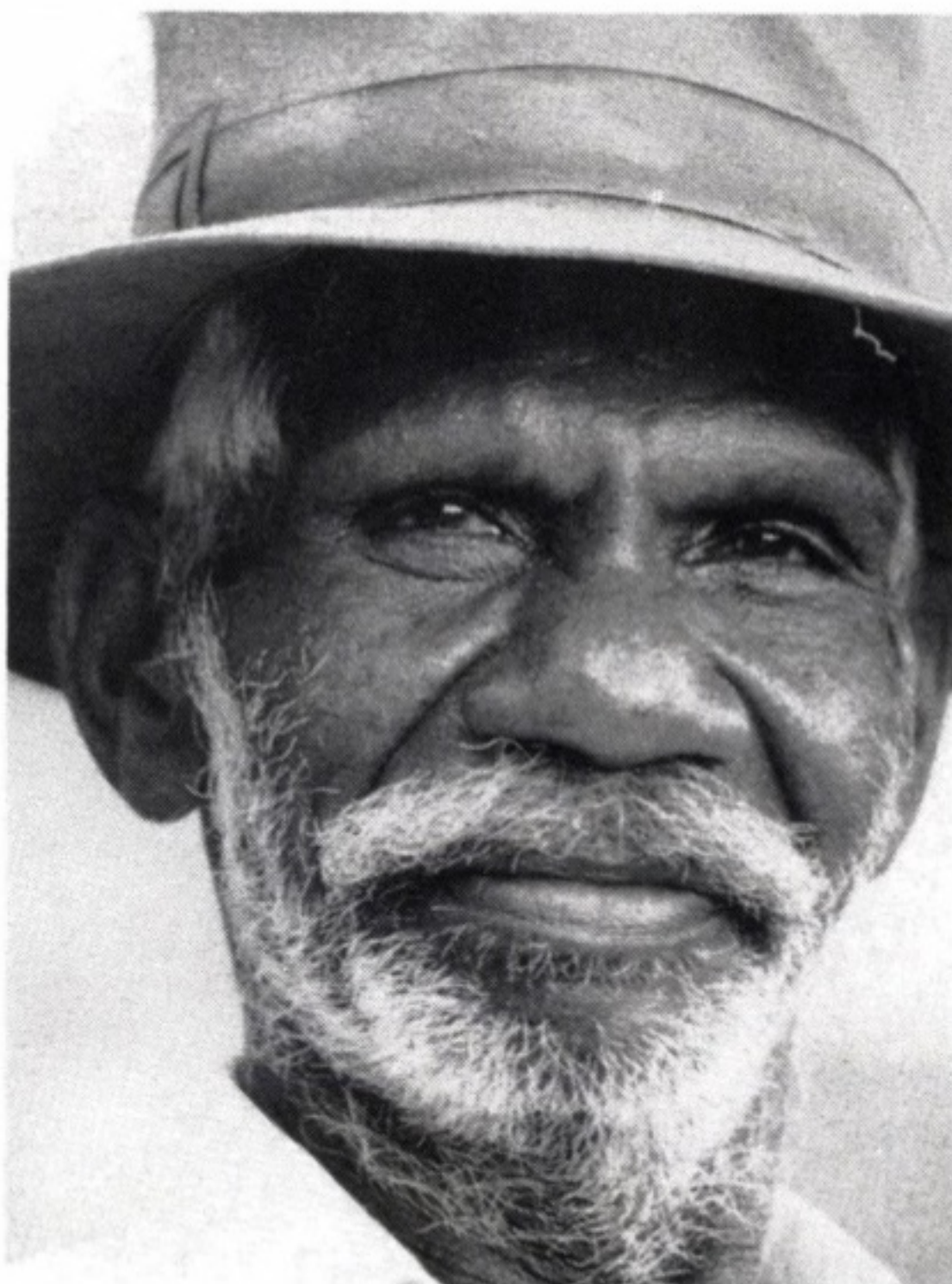
Aboriginal victory

Australian court returns native people's land in historic ruling.

It might look like a dot on the map, but for the Australian Aboriginals, Murray Island has enormous importance. After a 10-year legal struggle the Murray Islanders have won back land taken from them by white settlers.

For the 200-300 people living on Murray Island, which sits in the middle of the Torres Straits between Australia and Papua New Guinea, the case was a matter of life and death. They feared that their small community would be torn apart by mining or fenced-off as cattle ranches.

The chances of legal success were not good. For in 1971 Aboriginal rights were effectively nullified by the Gove Lands Case, where tribes attempted to stop a mining company from operating in the Gove peninsula. The tribes claimed that they had a 'native title' to the land which their ancestors had occupied for centuries. However the Courts decided that because Aboriginals were nomadic and had not built settlements in any particular area, they could not lay



Indigenous peoples make their presence felt.

claim to own land. The Courts declared that the land was *terra nullius* or uninhabited desert and the mining companies were given a free hand to send in the bulldozers.

But on 3 June of this year, Canberra's High Court agreed that the previous ruling was wrong. The judge described the way in which the Aboriginals were dispossessed as

'the darkest aspect of the history of the nation,' adding that there must be an end to 'past injustices'. The court ruled that Murray Island be handed back to the indigenous inhabitants for their 'possession, occupation, use and enjoyment' under 'communal native title'.

But the ruling is strictly limited. Fearing a flood of applications, the Court ruled that this sort of native title can be removed by the Queensland Parliament if it acts under what is described as a 'valid exercise of powers'.

However it could help block developments, especially by the mining companies. And these companies, predictably, have been upset by the decision. John Clunes, public affairs officer of the Chamber of Mines and Energy, feels that the Aboriginals are being given too much power: 'We're not against land rights for Aboriginals. We are opposed to a specific group being given rights superior to those of other groups'.

Other land rights cases are now in the pipeline. The Kimberly Aboriginal people in the Utemorrah Case are asking for rights over 120,000 square kilometres of land and an equal amount of sea. Who knows? They just might win.

Sarah Brownsdon, Perth/
The Weekly Journal, Issue 17



Royal favours

Those bored by the public press exposés of Fergie, Princess Diana and other British royals might be more interested in their annual salaries from the state - which are untaxed.

Elizabeth, Queen	\$15,800,000
Charles, Prince of Wales	\$4,354,000
Elizabeth, Queen Mother	\$1,286,000
Philip, Duke of Edinburgh	\$718,000
Andrew, Duke of York	\$498,000
Anne, Princess Royal	\$456,000
Princess Margaret	\$438,000
Prince Edward	\$192,000
Princess Alice	\$174,000

However the Queen does pay \$1,272,000 to be shared between the Dukes of Gloucester and Kent and Princess Alexandra. Charles' income is received tax-free from 75 per cent of the revenue of the Duchy of Cornwall.

From Report of the Royal Trustees, 1990, quoted in The Economist, Vol 324, No 7774, 1992

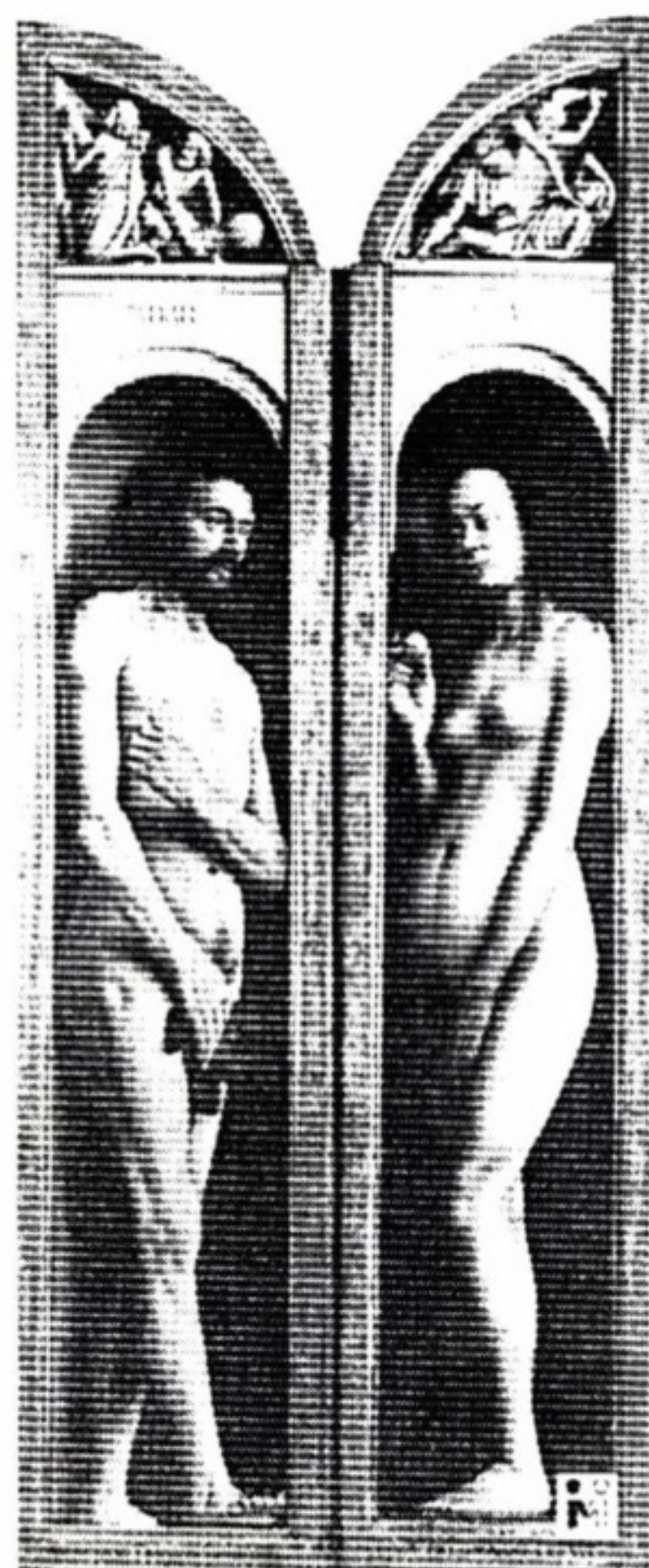
Eve's revenge

Biblical 'woman' has generally been considered a second-class citizen since her creation from one of Adam's ribs. But the recent publication of The Women's Bible Commentary sets the record straight with an interpretation of the Bible from a feminist perspective. Suddenly, Eve is no longer easy prey for a lying snake but a heroine - the necessary protagonist for a story that required sexual awareness in order to create the human race.

The Garden of Eden was a sterile place without birth or death before Eve ate from the tree of knowledge, and her decision to take the apple was a conscious act which brought knowledge and culture to her and her family. By contrast Adam is seen as a passive bystander who takes the fruit from Eve without question and pathetically absolves himself from all responsibility for the act when God accuses him of disobedience, saying simply that the fruit was given to him by the woman God had provided.

The Women's Bible Commentary edited by Carol A Newsom and Sharon H Ringe is published by The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), London. Price in UK £20.

Stefani Langenegger/Gemini



WORLD BANK

Ticket to ride

An extraordinary train brings hope to India's poor.

THE crowds on the platform of the Farah railway station in India arrived before dawn, limping on makeshift crutches, leading the blind, carrying the sick, all gathering in the hope of a miracle. They peer down the track as a small white train trundles into view and grinds to a halt. The Lifeline Express, Jeevan Rekha as it is

ical advances to the heart of the impoverished Indian countryside, treating a host of common ailments from cataracts to polio. Crowds gather wherever the train stops.

India's immense railway network of over 65,000 kilometres of track makes the train an ideal way of reaching such inaccessible rural districts as Farah, where locals are cut off from medical help and too poor to make the long journey to a city hospital.

Sadly though, there are too many cases for even a miracle train to cope with. In the first few days at Farah the train is swamped by over 3,500 cases. And as word spreads, thousands more flock to the train.

'I don't like turning people away but what can we do? To make a significant impact, India would need ten or twenty trains like this,' says Impact India calliper specialist, Bhishan Hemade.

Critics argue that the money spent on equipping the train would be better spent opening ten or twenty basic clinics. With its operating theatre idle in transit for long periods, the train's efficiency is thrown into question. And officials at under-staffed local hospitals argue that the train cannot provide post-surgery care, leaving them charged with the responsibility of following up operations.

But the train's doctors say that the enormous outreach of the Lifeline Express more than compensates for its deficiencies. While operating time is limited, the train also gives doctors an ideal opportunity to teach the rural poor the importance of hygiene, basic health care and vaccination.

And for the lucky few, like ten-year-old Solinda Kumar, the 'Cure on Wheels' can transform a life. Experimenting with a new calliper he grins broadly and exclaims: 'I can walk'.

Tony Smith/Newsvision International



Latest medical advances steam to the rescue.

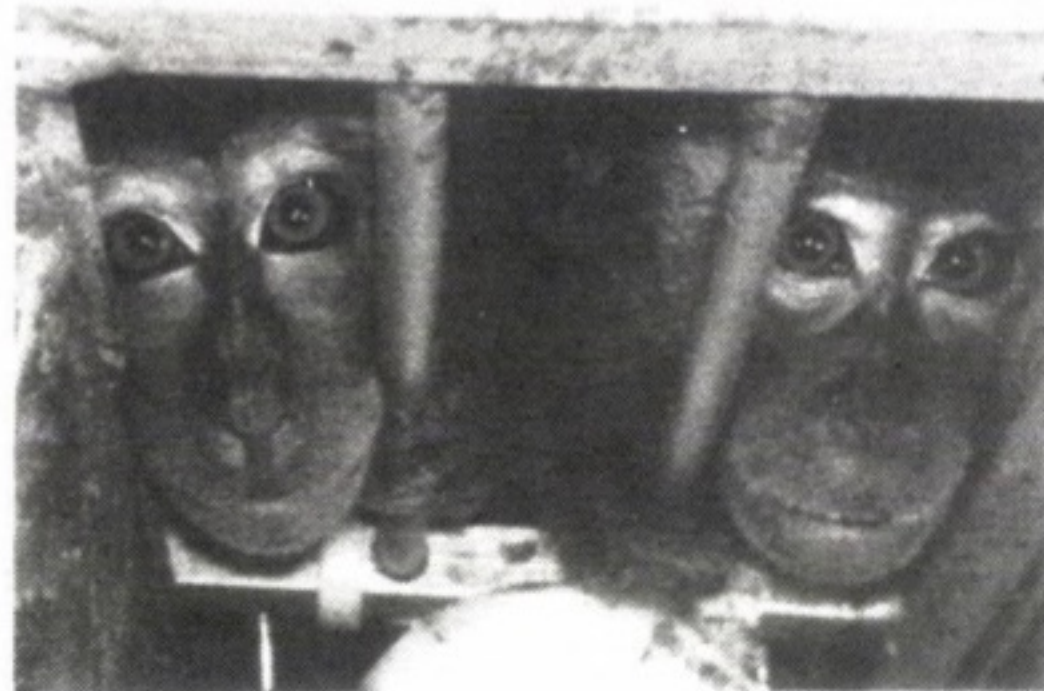
known in Hindi, is a fully-equipped hospital which was launched last year through funding from Impact India, a New York-based aid organization, to travel the length and breadth of India, halting at remote villages.

In its sophisticated operating theatre teams of expert doctors bring the latest med-

Controversial monkey ad banned

A powerful advert highlighting the suffering of thousands of monkeys supplied to UK research laboratories by Sussex firm Shamrock (GB) Ltd, has been banned by

**from Paradise
to Hell –
via Brighton!**



The British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) has launched a campaign to highlight the suffering of thousands of monkeys supplied to UK research laboratories by Sussex firm Shamrock (GB) Ltd, has been banned by

advertisers on the grounds that it is too 'controversial'. Booking agencies National Solos Sites Ltd and More O'Ferrall Adshel refused to accept the full colour poster which featured a photograph of two caged macaque monkeys, with the slogan 'From Paradise to Hell via Brighton'. It was part of a campaign run by the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) intended to draw attention to the mental and physical suffering of wild monkeys captured from the forests and jungles of Asia and Africa to endure death in Britain's research laboratories. The advertising campaign in Brighton was aimed at highlighting Shamrock (GB) Ltd's central role in this trade.

News from British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, July 1992



PALOMO / LA JORNADA / MMEXICO CITY

END

END Quote

I just can't wait till this campaign is over so I can say: "Bob, open the garage door and get out the Maserati! Open the safe and get out the jewels."

Georgette Mosbacher, wife of Robert Mosbacher, George Bush's campaign chairman.



A feel for freedom: Ugandan political songwriter Geoffrey Oryema.



music

A Week in the Real World

by various artists (*Real World*)

In 1982 Peter Gabriel and journalist Thomas Broome got together to stage the first festival of the World Organization of Music and Dance (WOMAD) at Shepton Mallet in England. Artistically it was a success, financially a fiasco, and it looked as if WOMAD would go down in history as an inspired flash in the pan. Ten years later, though, the organization is still going strong, staging festivals worldwide (15 this year), and providing educational resources for schools.

WOMAD has been at the centre of the ongoing argument about the nature of that elusive field of activity known as 'world music'. More important, it has stimulated enough people and created enough activity to prove that fashion and marketability are not the only things that count. WOMAD has changed a lot of people's listening habits and set a few ripples going in the music business at large. And even if it hasn't yet shaken things to their core – it's still hard to get airtime for non-Anglo-American artists – it has moved mountains in terms of bringing different audiences and artists together worldwide.

Affiliated to WOMAD is Real World Records, based at Peter Gabriel's recording studio in Wiltshire. Last year the organization successfully staged an experiment in recording – a week in which musicians were invited to these extremely pleasant rural surroundings so as to network, jam and record together. Some

musicians did their own work, others staged unlikely collaborations. Producers played an important part too – people more used to working in mainstream pop were suddenly faced with the challenge of recording, say, a Tasmanian dance troupe. The experience, in theory, was to be beneficial to everyone, an all-round eye-opener.

This record is the first of two compilations featuring miscellaneous work from the week. Among those playing are gospellers the Holmes Brothers, Columbian *cumbia* star Toto la Momposina, and St Petersburg's jokey *balalaika* virtuosi the Terem Quartet. But some of the more interesting tracks here are the collaborations – house-mix duo the Grid, for example, get together with bass maestro Jah Wobble, Spanish guitarist Juan Cañizares and Japanese percussionist Joji Hirota, on a dance mix that doesn't quite gel. Rather more successful is the Grid's nightclub funk track with Wendell Holmes offering a laid-back, rasping commentary. Former Clannad member Pol Brennan excels too in the company of Joji Hirota, Chinese female singer Liu Sola and flautist Guo Yue.

In general here the musicians are gravitating towards genuine kindred spirits; in *this* year's recording week (the fruits of which will be released later) rather more clashing cultural and musical combinations seemed to be emerging, with even more experimentation in the dance area – something that should help break Real World's reputation for being excessively sober and traditionalist. In the mean time **A Week in the Real World** is inevitably a mixed bag but gives a good impression of what it must have been like to be around for one of the most invigorating and barrier-breaking recording experiments in some time.

Politics ☆☆☆

Entertainment ☆☆☆



film

City of Joy

directed by Roland Joffe

When Hollywood attempts to deal with Third World scenarios there is no getting round the fact that there has to be a Western hero in the foreground. Sometimes the results are embarrassing, but occasionally a director finds enough leeway around the convention to handle it with sensitivity and intelligence.

City of Joy may be hamstrung by having to provide a show-off performance for Patrick Swayze, oozing concern. But the film indulges him only half-willingly; even if his blustery performance looks out of place, you can always ignore it and attend to the more interesting story at hand – that of a self-help school and dispensary in one of Calcutta's poorest quarters.

Swayze plays Max Lowe, an embittered American doctor who, after a failed operation, goes to Calcutta to find himself and loses his wallet instead. His arrival in town coincides with that of Hasari Pal (Om Puri) a man forced to leave his village to seek a living. Hasari arrives with his wife and children, and gets a job as a rickshaw driver in the employ of the area's all-powerful godfather. Everyone eventually winds up in the City of Joy centre run by Joan Bethel (Pauline Collins); Hasari and family discover that they too can belong in the city and Lowe overcomes his sulks to lend his medical talents to the cause. But before the centre can flourish, they have to deal with the menaces of the godfather's brutal son.

Joffe is one of the first Western directors to convey Indian life with-

out stereotyping. The film manages to fulfil its commercial brief of providing romance in foreign places while managing to eschew exoticism – the horror and degradation of Calcutta's poverty are clear, but so is the stress on human resilience and hope suggested in the title. The theme of leprosy is treated rather with kid gloves – possibly because Joffe was aware of the risk of exploitation – and the eventual solution to Hasari's struggles is rather glib. But at least the film is aware of the key political questions of 'community' and 'self-determination'.

City of Joy is uneven but it milks the odd tear with more intelligence than most.

Politics ☆☆☆

Entertainment ☆☆☆



books

The Redundancy of Courage

by Timothy Mo (*Vintage*)

East Timor: A Western-Made Tragedy

by Mark Aarons and Robert Domm (*Left Book Club*)

Nearly a year after Indonesian troops murdered unarmed civilians in Dili, the event is still making headlines in Australian newspapers, if not in the rest of the West.

Unfortunately the massacre of 12 November only continued the bloody process which began when Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975 – a process documented by these very different books.

The Redundancy of Courage comes as close to a personal history of East Timor's resistance to



Hard times in Calcutta: Om Puri takes the strain in *City of Joy*.

THE classic

The Grapes of Wrath

... being the film that showed poverty in the heart of the US

WHEN John Steinbeck sold the film rights of his novel *The Grapes of Wrath* to Darryl F Zanuck's 20th Century Fox, he insisted upon an unusual clause being inserted in the contract to ensure that the resulting movie should 'fairly and reasonably retain the main action and social content of the said literary property'. As directed by John Ford, scripted by Nunnally Johnson and with Henry Fonda perfectly cast in the leading role as Tom Joad, the film admirably lived up to this difficult condition, presenting a starkly honest vision of a society viciously divided into the haves and the have-nots.

When I first saw *The Grapes of Wrath* as a child I can remember more than anything being astonished by its graphic depiction of poverty in the US. That people could actually die of starvation in the richest country on earth was, and indeed still is, an amazing idea to find in a mainstream Hollywood movie. Being a quite naive British kid raised on an unending TV diet of cheerily optimistic American imports, it was a revelation to see a film which quite calmly expressed the ideas that US society was savagely unjust, that labour was exploited as a matter of course, and that the police were often both corrupt and murderously inclined.

Watch the film again on video or TV in the 1990s and you'll find its clarity of vision is undiminished. The story, as streamlined for the screen, is starkly simple: a family of Oklahoma sharecroppers have been evicted off their 40 acres by the bank. Released from jail, eldest son Tom joins them just before they migrate to California aboard a rickety old truck. The grandfather and grandmother die during the journey; they encounter employers that refuse to pay even subsistence wages and a repressive police force that kills as a first resort. Tom kills a vigilante after the murder of his friend, the ex-preacher Casey (John Carradine). The family finally find some decent treatment at a transit camp run by the Federal Government but Tom is forced to leave because he's a wanted man...

Within the bare skeleton of this scenario, the film articulates a cohesive and compelling story which powerfully depicts society as it is while offering also a developing consciousness of how it should be. These two related levels of meaning are bound together by the way in which the film

forces us to share the perspective of the Joad family. The movie is organized as a double journey of discovery – both for the Joad family and for us, the audience.

The Joads gradually have their illusions shattered about where they stand in relationship to society at large. California, which they at first think of as the 'land of milk and honey', good wages and full employment, soon turns out to be exactly the reverse of all of these things. If we had any illusions in the first place, they're quickly shattered by the increasing desperation of the Joads' plight and we're forced to face up to the real nature of a society that has casually discarded them and many others to struggle for survival on the very margins between life and death.

By sharing the family's point of view, we're made to see many seemingly obvious things in a new light: the several opulent roadside service stations, for instance where employees wear spotless white uniforms. Here bread can only be bought as sandwiches, not as a whole loaf (producing one of the most affecting scenes in the film), everything is shiny, clean and crucially out of reach of the Joads. They don't have any stake in this consumerist world and this freedom of the highways which so many other American movies – and ads for that matter – have glamorized into a myth. An exchange between two service-station employees indicates how far this society has turned its back on them: 'They ain't human, a human being wouldn't live the way they do. A human being couldn't stand to be so miserable.'

By the end of the film both the Joads and the audience have been drawn to a new consciousness about themselves and their relationship and responsibilities to the world around them. In Ma Joad's final uplifting speech, she's speaking for audience and family alike, drawn together finally and totally into a shared viewpoint: 'We're the people that live. They can't wipe us out, they can't lick us. We'll go on forever because we're the people!'

Both a film of its time and a film for all time, *The Grapes of Wrath* still has the power to move because it's still true – sadly in every respect.

Tom Tunney

The Grapes of Wrath directed by John Ford (1940).

Indonesia's invasion as a novel is likely to get: the setting is fictional but barely concealed. The novel is narrated by a Macau/Toronto-educated gay Chinese hotelier who befriends an over-educated, 'Marxist on a hill' elite in whose struggle for independence he becomes a significant player.

Mo's description of life with the resistance to the occupation is detailed; any more detailed and the book would be a combat manual. But while its cause is plainly just, the resistance isn't romanticized – its idealism and facade of democracy conceals an autocratic leadership which indulges in the politics of grudge, self-interest and survival.

Mo tells his tale with insight, acerbic wit and self-deprecation. And despite the terrible odds he signs off with a note of optimism. He has us remember the earlier words of a resistance leader: 'They can win in the short term, make things go on longer. In the medium term it might get harder for us. But nothing can stop the march of a people seeking their freedom. Nothing and no-one.'

Politics ★★★★★

Entertainment ★★★★★

Aarons and Domm provide a more orthodox account. The Dili tragedy, they say, was a symptom of the political stalemate. 'Jakarta maintains its control over East Timor only by use of repression... The resistance lacks the military power to overthrow Jakarta, yet it enjoys immense popular support.'

That support has still not been garnered internationally. Words of reproof were all Indonesia received for the 1991 massacre, just as it easily weathered UN rebukes for the initial invasion. The invasion suited the US which wanted its submarines to use the straits on the northern side of the island. Along with the Australian Government, which by the late 1980s was negotiating with Jakarta about oil fields in the Timor Gap, Washington has worked against international efforts to ascertain the truth and take effective action.

One doesn't have to be a cynic to find *A Western-Made Tragedy's* conclusions unsurprising: US and Australian foreign policy is unprincipled and self-seeking. Their duplicity on East Timor has made them accomplices to a great tragedy.

Politics ★★★★★

Entertainment ★★

STAR RATING

Excellent ★★★★★

Very good ★★★★★

Good ★★★★★

Fair ★★★★★

Poor ★★★★★

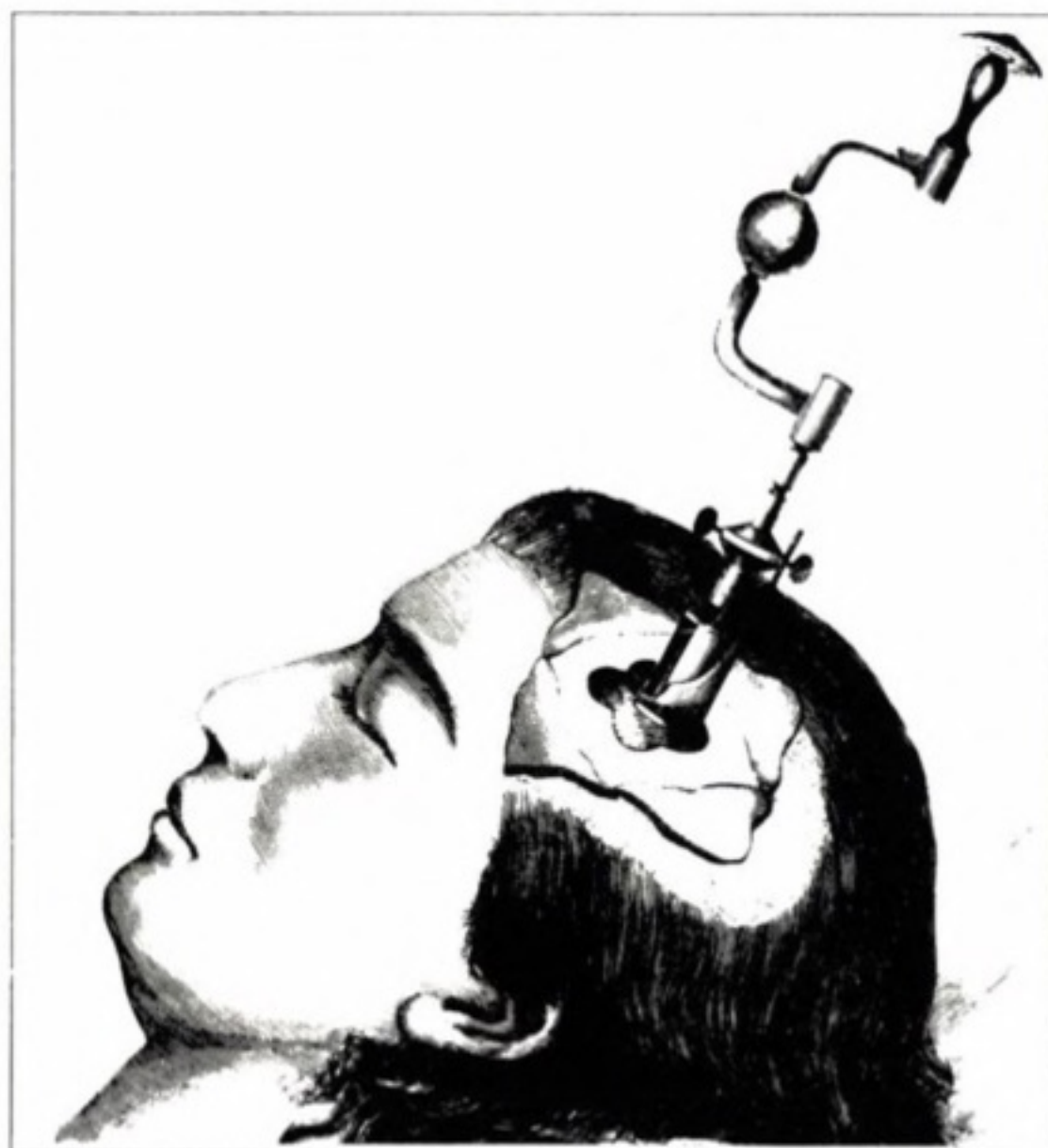
Reviews editor: Chris Brazier



QUESTIONS

...that have always intrigued you appear in this, your section, and are answered by other readers. Please address your answers and questions to 'Curiosities'.

Can anyone recommend a book about trepanation or tell me anything about the benefits of having a hole bored in the skull?



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

Medieval mystics also drilled holes in skulls to release evil spirits.

● Trepanation was the process whereby a hole was scraped through the skull using flints. The evidence for this practice is based largely on prehistoric skulls. In terms of current understanding, there are no benefits to be gained from trepanation save for evacuating blood clots from the surface of the brain. It is unlikely that this was the reason for the operation being performed in prehistory, since nearly all the subjects would have died of infections, and forensic examination reveals that although most subjects died at the time this was done, a fair proportion survived: some even underwent trepanation a second time. Prehistoric trepanation probably did not breach the coverings of the brain, but merely penetrated the skull.

Why it was performed is not known, though some believe it was meant to relieve schizophrenia, which frequently includes sensations of thoughts and feelings being forced into or pulled out of the head.

Dr JS Barrett
London, UK.

● It has been suggested that the removal of a disc of bone from the skull was an attempt to cure mental illness. But there are many records of apparently 'mentally ill' people in ancient times who were accorded a mystical or supernatural status. This conflicts with the view that trepanation represented an attempt to 'cure' them by surgery. I would prefer to hazard a guess that they were in fact respond-

ing to a specific pathology, perhaps a tumour, or haemorrhage, or water on the brain.

Clare Smith
Leicester, UK.

Are broad-leafed trees better than conifers in terms of soaking up excess carbon dioxide – and so helping to reduce global warming?

● As regards reducing global warming the impact of planting any type of tree is virtually zero, when compared to the levels of CO₂ produced by industry. As for commercial planting – the trees are turned into paper and eventually burnt to produce more CO₂. But, in direct answer to the question, conifers are better as overall they have a larger surface area of leaf than broad-leafed trees and are in leaf for the whole year while broadleaves are deciduous.

Stuart Priestley
Leeds, UK.

Why is it inadvisable – or dangerous – to allow victims of electrical torture to take fluids until many hours after the ordeal?

● I was surprised by the published response to this question (NI 234). Electrical impulses do not 'remain in the body' after the source of voltage has been disconnected. No more voltage, no more current flow, as Ohm would say. Having had a fairly good sweep through the literature, I can find no references to the need to avoid giving water after torture. The body is 80 per cent water in any case, and so a litre more or less won't make a hell of a lot of difference.

Dr JS Barrett
London, UK.

QUESTIONS awaiting your answers:

I understand that a waterless WC – using sawdust to produce a high-grade compost – has been invented by a Swede. Does anyone know whether this WC can be sited in a house? How is it ventilated? How is it cleaned? Whether it smells? And where can I find a detailed description?

EM Thropp
Credition, UK

I am told it is better to leave a fluorescent light switched on when you leave a room as its initial switching-on cost is high compared with its running cost. Is this true and if so at what point does it become more economic to switch it off?

Anthony Twist
Shrewsbury, UK

How did the wretched term (economic) 'basket case' originate? Who used it first and in reference to which country?

Stephen Langford
Paddington, Australia

If you have any questions or answers please send them to Curiosities, **New Internationalist**, 55 Rectory Road, Oxford OX4 1BW, UK, or to your local NI office (see inside front cover).



THREE TIMES
THE HUNGER...

THREE TIMES
THE POVERTY...

THREE TIMES
THE PROFIT...

GATT3

(18)



IN WALL STREET
NO-ONE CAN HEAR
YOU STARVE

The end of Animal Farm

'Mr Johnson and Comrade Stinky walked away hand in hand... I did not understand then that I had witnessed the great moment: the beginning of the revolution which changed the face of Animal Farm.' In a fictional letter to George Orwell, Israel Shamir concludes his satire on what happened to the Soviet Union.

A FEW days later I switched on the TV in my Human's guest room in Animal Farm and instead of the usual stories about the Best Working Horses I saw Stinky's visit to Mr Johnson's Farm. It was just like a royal visit, with a red carpet and a sea of journalists and cameras. Overnight, Stinky had become the most popular Pig in the world. Even Animals who had known him for years started to look at him with new eyes as he proclaimed: 'We shall make our life every bit as jolly as that of the Johnsons.'

Until now life on Animal Farm had been boring but easy-going. Every animal got its low quality but ample fodder and had no reason to work harder. But all this was going to change.

Then, Max the Fox – a Fox of good standing with many influential Pig friends – received a novel toy from Johnson. It was a glorious, flashing, Japanese videobox. A Pig with access to the press that printed the chits for hay sales bought the videobox. But Max the Fox made a smarter move: he used his small worthless chits to buy huge amounts of hay which he drove to Johnson's to swap for 20 more videoboxes.

This made quite an impact on the Animals. Now they could see that the good life was not tilling fields nor weaving cloth, but selling videos and exporting hay. The Foxes and Pigs started to sell hay to bring in Human delights. And hay became scarce. Proletarian Cows and Horses had to queue, waiting for its delivery.

They stopped working: queuing for hay was consuming all their time. As hay became scarce Foxes discovered that they could get handsome profits by selling hay for more chits. And although the Horses and Cows were unhappy nobody understood their language.

Some old-style Pigs opposed Stinky. They thought one should leave some fodder for Animals, and they were supported by a small and esoteric group of intellectual Horses who tried to remind the Animals that life outside also included slaughterhouses.

But Stinky was unstoppable. When he introduced a new freedom of speech campaign, Mr Johnson Senior unveiled a competition for the best piece of journalism debunking Animal Farm's past. All dark spots of the Farm's history were exposed, all skeletons were removed from the closets, while life outside was truly glorified.

The Farm became a miserable place. Stinky was awarded honorary doctorates at Salamanca and Oxford but became increasingly unpopular back home.

'Very soon Stinky will be overthrown, the Old Guard Pigs will rule again and we shall lose all our hard-earned villas and millions,' said Max the Fox to his friends. 'It's time to act.' He remembered Tough the Hog, once in charge of a farmstead but dismissed by the senior Pigs in a row over stolen tarts. Tough was a great admirer of the Human way of life which he felt consisted of executive jets and whisky galore. Max found Tough inside his sty brooding over an empty bottle and offered him the chance of a lifetime...

Then Max went to Stinky and warned him of the danger: 'You will be overthrown if you do not protect yourself. You must use the Dogs for your own defence.'

'How can I – a Salamanca and Oxford Doctor of Philosophy –

behave like an old founder of the Farm?' Stinky whined. But eventually he agreed that the Dogs could be bought in on the sly.

Max chose old toothless Dogs and placed them around Stinky's residence. Then Tough the Hog appeared with a carefully chosen band of Foxes. 'Bite me if you dare,' he exclaimed, 'but you cannot stop the Animals craving for the Human way of life.'

These noble words were immediately broadcast by Johnson TV and brought many a cheer. The Foxes rushed for the palace, while the old Dogs could not figure out what they were supposed to do...

Stinky claimed he had been imprisoned by the Dogs but this cut

no ice with Tough's band. He was dismissed and locked up. The Day of Great Victory over the Dogs was made a national holiday and a statue of Tough strangling a ferocious Baskerville Hound was erected on the main square.

'The Pigs' rule is over,' proclaimed Tough the Hog. Pigs who supported Tough, were renamed Swine. Tough did not care for the old style titles: he accepted a perfectly Human position of Executive Manager.

More and more meadows and pastures belonging to Animal Farm were handed over to Human ranch owners in exchange for Free Aid. Johnson fortified his fences to stop hungry Horses and Cows grazing there, and only Foxes and Swine engaged in export were allowed across.

'But what could they export?' I wondered – until I spotted Max overseeing a truck being loaded up with rather thin Cows.

'It's silly to be the only Farm that has lots of Cattle but does not export beef,' he explained.

Some of the Animals – mainly Horses and few Pigs – began to notice what was going on and gathered in protest. 'Animal Farm for Animals!' they shouted. 'Do not sell us to the butcher!'

The gates of Tough's office opened and a pack of Great Danes stepped out. These were not old toothless creatures but strong, ferocious beasts that charged the crowd. Tough won the day – but discontent was strong. Even my guide Linda started to have her doubts as she saw her friends disappearing into the meat trucks.

Max the Fox, meanwhile, went to Mr Johnson Senior and came back with a contract: 'Animal Farm will belong to Mr Johnson and will be called Johnson's New Farm. Mr Johnson will provide the animals with hay. It is only natural that he will be free to take some animals to his facilities. Mr Tough will remain Executive Manager.'

The contract was signed and that is how the troublesome history of Animal Farm came to its end. The new Human masters were forced to send quite a number of Animals to slaughterhouses. Nobody needed so many hay sales personnel...

Johnson made his Ranch even more efficient, closed a few outlying corrals and turned every literate Pig into chops. Foxes were sent to furriers and Johnson's TV closed down as it now created inappropriate expectations among the Animals.

Thoroughly disgusted I left the blighted place. On board the train I met Max the Fox and Tough the Hog; they were on their way to Florida.

Israel Shamir is an Israeli journalist based in Moscow.



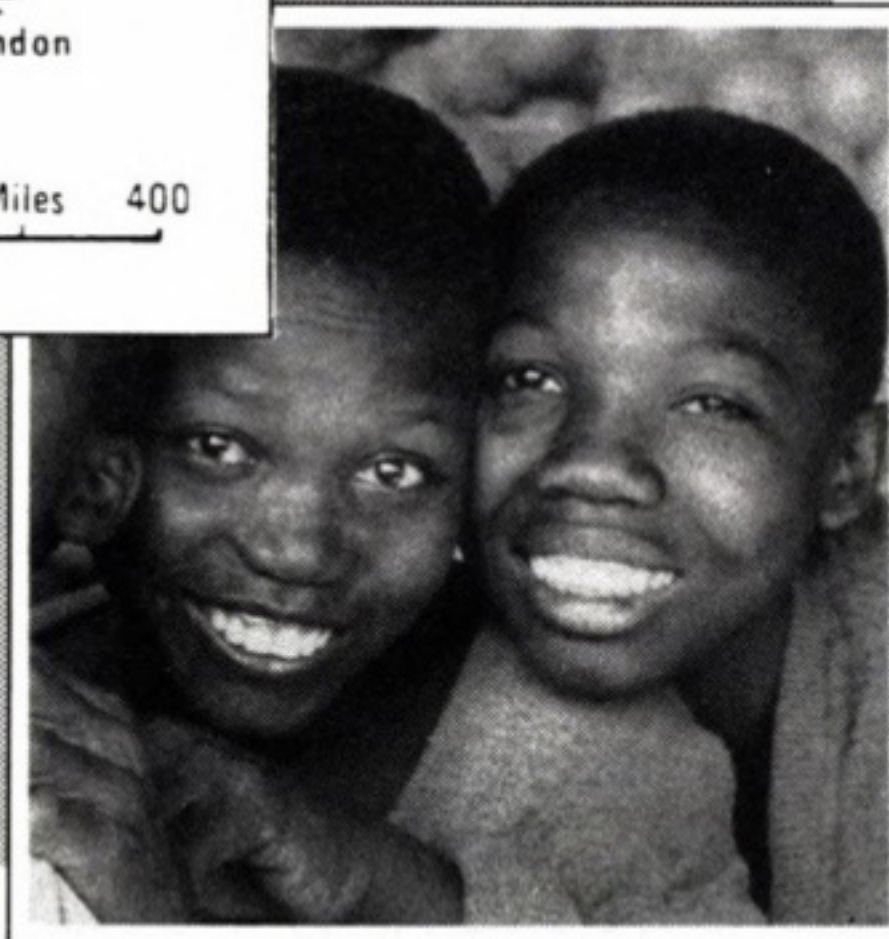
ILLUSTRATION: ALAN HUGHES

South Africa

SINCE the urban insurrection began in 1984, South Africa has seemed on the brink of major changes that would herald the end of apartheid either through revolution or reform. The release of Nelson Mandela and unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1990 held great promise.

Walking through Johannesburg's formerly white Hillbrow suburb with its current mix of residents you could well believe apartheid was dead. Some apartheid legislation has gone: the 'Immorality' Act, most of the laws controlling black urbanization and the acts which forbade black purchase of land in much of the country. But the legacy of the system remains starkly obvious – not least in that blacks still cannot vote.

Reformist President FW de Klerk has been willing to negotiate, but reluctant to give up power in exchange for democracy as the ANC demands. The ANC has also compromised in recognizing that the armed struggle was not its strongest suit, and in shifting away from socialist rhetoric. Despite this, in July 1992 the constitutional talks (CODESA) broke down. While most people want to avoid the vortex of civil war



and violence, the stakes are high and the historical legacy difficult.

Probably the most important social change over the last decade has been the rapid move to the towns. Informal settlements like Khayelitsha ('new home') near Cape Town hardly existed before 1980; today it is

home to some three-quarters of a million people. Such areas have been the site of explosive politics, as impoverished people struggle for scarce resources in a volatile political world.

Black disunity sometimes surprises outsiders. But poverty is intense. And black people like everyone else can be social-

ists and capitalists, petrol pump attendants or professionals.

The ANC certainly seems to command majority support but it by no means holds a monopoly. Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha still has a base amongst Zulu speakers and some migrant workers on the Rand. Many Inkatha supporters, despite their neo-traditional garb, are industrial workers.

The South African economy is the strongest in the region. But it has been in recession for some years, exacerbating social conflict. Unemployment rates for blacks are extremely high, up to 30 per cent.

Yet there is a good deal to be optimistic about. Most political prisoners have been released and the major black political parties, even the Communist Party, are relatively free to operate. South African destabilization tactics in the region, especially in Mozambique, have eased. Pretoria is full of born-again Afrikaners, who recognize that a new nationalism is unavoidable. There is huge demand for education. Much depends on a political settlement, compromise and the containment of violence.

W. Beinart

AT A glance

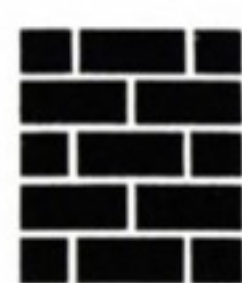
Excellent ★★★★★
Good ★★★★
Fair ★★★
Poor ★★
Appalling ★



INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★

Wide racial gap; economic recession means high unemployment.

1982: ★



SELF-RELIANCE ★★★★★

Self-sufficient in food and many raw materials.

1982: ★★★



POSITION OF WOMEN ★★

Black women still bear brunt of poverty.

1982: ★★

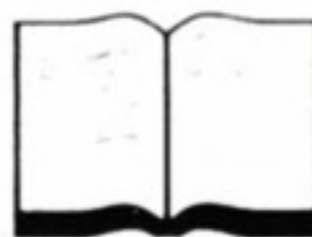


POLITICS

White National Party still rules after 44 years, but losing grip.



1982



LITERACY

Figures not available.

1982: ★★



FREEDOM ★★

No black vote; most political prisoners freed; lively press; security forces uncontrolled.

1982: ★



LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★★★

62 years (US 76 years); estimate less than 60 for Africans, 73 for whites.

1982: ★★

Leader President FW de Klerk.

Economy GNP per capita \$2,530 (US \$21,790).

Monetary unit: Rand.

Main exports: Gold, metals and minerals.

Main imports: Machinery and equipment, vehicles and chemicals.

People 35.9 million (60 per cent urban).

Health Infant mortality 66 per 1,000 live births (US 9 per 1,000).

Culture Africans make up 75 per cent of the population; Whites 14 per cent; Coloureds 9 per cent; Asians 2.5 per cent. Dutch colonised Cape in 17th century; Zulu and other African kingdoms expanded in early 19th century; Boer republics established in interior in mid-19th century; British conquered them all. Union under white rule in 1910; apartheid introduced in 1948; Republic in 1961; ANC unbanned in 1990.

Religion: Mainly Christian. Dutch Reformed churches predominate amongst Afrikaners and coloured people; African independent churches have largest proportion of African membership, followed by Catholics and Methodists.

Languages: English and Afrikaans are the official languages; Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana the main African languages.

Sources: *The State of the World's Children 1992*, *World Bank Report 1992*.

Last profiled in August 1982



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Christmas
★ Meet some of the New
Internationalist team
★ Snap up end-of-range bargains



WE will be having a stall at the exciting Global Partnership '92 Olympia event, which is advertised above. Members of the NI team will be selling a range of our publications – like the **1993 Third World Calendar**, the **1993 Almanac**, the **Native American cards** and **The Food Book** – together with some of our most popular T-shirts.

It's always fun for us to meet and talk with New Internationalist readers and we would be delighted to hear your views about the magazine.

We also have some end-of-range T-shirts and other publications. The Global Partnership weekend is an ideal time to browse through the bargains and select some great gifts for Christmas.

Yet the New Internationalist stall is only a small part of a very big event – there are over 200 exhibitors at Olympia this year. Besides the bustling Christmas market there is live music and dance with different acts every hour, a series of excellent feature films by Third World directors, discussions and debates with distinguished speakers, Javanese shadow puppet shows and live storytelling for the young (and not so young).

To keep you going there will be a variety of mouth-watering snacks and meals on sale based on Caribbean, Indian and Creole cuisine. The bar is open all day.

New Internationalist sponsorship for Global Partnership '92

We think this annual event is one of the most important in our calendar, and we are pleased to be associated as sponsors. With nearly all the UK environmental, human rights, fair trading and aid organisations represented, **Global Partnership '92** is a major forum for people concerned with Third World justice. And it's enjoyable too. We look forward to seeing you at Olympia.

How to get there: take the London Underground District Line to Kensington (Olympia) and Olympia is a short walk – follow the signposts.



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INTERNATIONAL

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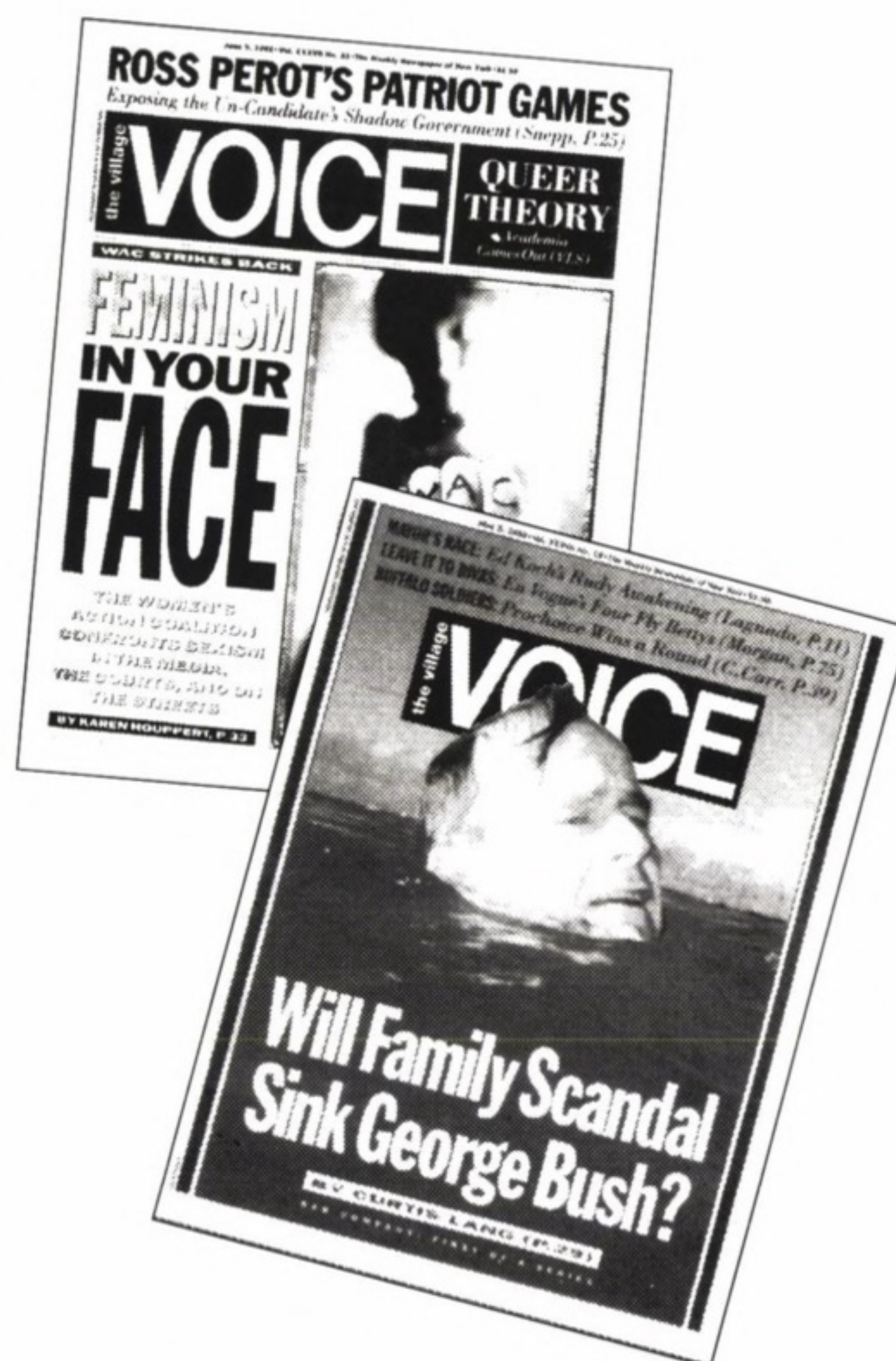
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